5-2009

Elementary principals' and special education teachers' understanding and implementation of inclusive practices: Are their espoused beliefs evident in practice?

Barbara Rivers Wrushen
University of Tennessee

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Barbara Rivers Wrushen entitled "Elementary principals' and special education teachers' understanding and implementation of inclusive practices: Are their espoused beliefs evident in practice?." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

Vincent Anfara, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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Dr. Vincent Anfara, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:

Dr. Gary Ubben
Dr. Pamela Angelle
Dr. Christopher Skinner

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges
Vice Chancellor and
Dean of Graduate Studies

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

Elementary Principals' and Special Education Teachers' Understanding and Implementation of Inclusive Practices: Are Their Espoused Beliefs Evident in Practice?

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Barbara Rivers Wrushen
May 2009

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family because they have a continuous history of encouraging me to reach my life goals and respecting my decisions. Their expectations are high and their support is unending. My parents, James and Essie Rivers, nurtured me as I grew up and taught me to be self-confident in difficult times. My husband, Hubert, reminds me that God is always first. My siblings and my nieces and nephews have always provided me with unconditional love and respect. The essence of what family is has always been a significant part of my life as demonstrated through the lives and actions of every member of my immediate family.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the member of my dissertation committee because of the time and attention they provided me. Many experiences that went beyond the dissertation experience were made possible for me through their recommendations and encouragement. Dr. Vince A. Anfara, Jr., who served as the chair of my dissertation committee, made sure that I understood what it meant to be held accountable for high quality work. I appreciated and valued his candor during this process. Dr. Gary Ubben provided practical guidance based on his years of experience with doctoral students. In our forum experience, I learned to listen to him and accept his advice. Dr. Pamela Angelle's perspective made me improve my work and stretch my thinking. Dr. Christopher Skinner, whose editing skills were invaluable, was willing to serve on my committee without hesitation. I would like to acknowledge the support that I received from Dr. Whitney Sherman, assistant professor at Virginia Commonwealth University. As my assigned mentor in the Barbara Jackson Scholars Program, she reviewed my prospectus and provided valuable feedback through various forms of communication. The members of Societas Docta, Inc. supported me with encouragement and financial assistance through scholarships for which I am grateful. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Chris Argyris who granted me written permission to use figures from two of his books that illustrate concepts related to Theories-in-Action.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the understanding and implementation of inclusive practices by elementary school principals and special education teachers in school systems in the Southeastern region of the United States. Tied to this purpose was the intent to investigate whether their espoused beliefs were consistent with their practices. These purposes were achieved through the lens of the theoretical framework, Theories-of-Action (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

A multi-site, instrumental, qualitative case study design using three sites provided the opportunity to examine the phenomenon under exploration. The overall intent of this study was instrumental. Elementary schools with full continuums of special education services from systems in the southeastern United States were selected purposely for the study. Nineteen participants included 5 administrators and 14 special education teachers. Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews (audio taped), documents, administrator survey, structured observations, and field notes provided appropriate data sources for information collected between January and May 2008.

Themes that developed based on data analysis suggested that participants expressed philosophical perspectives regarding inclusion that posit that students with disabilities have a human right to opportunities for participation in the general education curriculum. Further, data indicated that implementing inclusive practices within schools vary and is highly influenced by the beliefs and actions of administrators and other stakeholders. Implications for improving district and school implementation practices and for future research are discussed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Page

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION 1

Statement of the Problem 5

Purpose of the Study 6

Definition of Terms 6

Research Questions 7

Delimitations and Limitations 8

Significance of the Study 9

Organization of the Study 10

CHAPTER 2 – REVIEW OF LITERATURE 12

The History of Inclusive Practices 12

Inclusion Defined 14

Inclusion and the Law 19

Inclusion and Philosophical Thought 25

Empirical Studies 32

Espoused Positive Attitudes 33

Incongruent Factors 35

Ambiguous Understandings 37

Theoretical Framework 40

CHAPTER 3 – METHOD 48
Assumptions and Rationale for a Qualitative Approach 48
Role of the Researcher 54
Data Collection Procedures 55
Semi-structured Interviews 57
Observations 62
Documents 63
Survey 63
Data Analysis Procedures 67
Methods of Verification 71
Chapter Summary 72
CHAPTER 4 – A PORTRAIT OF MOUNTAIN VIEW WITH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS FROM A SINGLE SITE 73
Chapter Introduction 73
School History 74
Community Demographics 74
School Demographics 76
School Characteristics 80
Physical Plant 80
Culture 81
Demographics for Research Participants 86
Major Themes 88

Continuum of Services 88
Least restrictive environment 89
Student rights 94
Meeting individual needs 96
Socialization needs 100
Appreciating differences 102
Dynamic Process 103
Being open to change 103
Team decisions 105
Support for students and teachers 106
Communication to facilitate changing practices 109
Implementation Strategies 111
Addressing varying attitudes 111
Impact of resources 113
Variety of options 116
Chapter Summary 120
CHAPTER 5 – A PORTRAIT OF P. T. MACKLEY WITH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS FROM A SINGLE SITE 122
Chapter Introduction 122
School History 122
Community Demographic 123
School Demographics 126

School Characteristics 132
School Plant 133
Culture 134
Demographics for Research Participants 137
Major Themes 139
School-Wide Process 140
Meeting individual academic needs 140
Developing the community attitude 144
Data-driven decisions 146
Implementing Best Practice 148
Facilitating an inclusive environment 148
Collaborative team approach 150
Teacher empowerment 153
Evolved Process 155
Student-centered teaching and learning 156
Meeting challenges 158
Stakeholder support 161
Chapter Summary 166
CHAPTER 6 – A PORTRAIT OF PEACH MILL WITH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS FROM A SINGLE SITE 169
Chapter Introduction 169
School History 169

Community Demographic 170
School Demographics 171
School Characteristics 180
School Plant 181
Culture 182
Demographics for Research Participants 186
Major Themes 188
Nurturing inclusive attitudes 189
Positive benefits for students 192
Participation by all stakeholders 195
Need for a Paradigm Shift 197
Recognizing status 197
Outlining change needs 200
Inconsistent progress 202
Develop an Inclusive Culture 206
Positive parental support 206
Starting where we are 208
A work in progress 210
Chapter Summary 215
CHAPTER 7 – CROSS-SITE FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS 216
Chapter Introduction 216
NCLB Comparisons 217

Research Question 1: How do Elementary Principals and Special Education Teachers Make Sense of Inclusion and Inclusive Practices? 219
Continuum of Services 220
Differing Viewpoints 221
A Philosophy of Inclusion 223
Importance of Social Experiences 224
Consistent Uncertainty 225
Summary 225
Research Question 2: How do Elementary Principals and Special Education Teachers Explain Inclusive Implementation Practices in Their Schools? 226
A Process of Change 227
Collaborative Team Approach 229
General Education Teacher Apprehension 229
Effect of Limited Resources 231
Summary 232
Research Question 3: How are Espoused Beliefs of Elementary Principals and Special Education Teachers Evident in the Implementation of Inclusive Practices in Their Schools? 233
Perceptions and Practices 234
Subtle Nuances 237
Inclusion Initiatives 238
Summary 239

Chapter Summary 240

CHAPTER 8 – CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS 242

Conclusions 242

Implications for Research and Practice 249

Lessons Learned for Practice 253

REFERENCES 256

APPENDICES 269

VITA 283

LIST OF TABLES

Table Page

1. Matrix of Interview Questions 58
2. Relationship between Theoretical Framework, Research Questions, Survey, Observations, and Interview Questions 61
3. Matrix of Data Sources 65
4. Code Mapping: Three Iterations of Analysis 68
5. Documental Table for the Development of Categories 70
6. Mountain View Racial and Ethnic Demographics 75
7. Mountain View Distribution of Classes 77
8. Demographic Data on Mountain View Interview Participants 87
9. Mountain View Structured Observation Results 119
10. Mackley Community Racial and Ethnic Demographics 124
11. Ethnic Sturctue of Mackley Student Population 127
12. Mackley Distribution of Classes 128
13. Demographic Data on P. T. Mackley Interview Participants 138
14. P. T. Mackley Structured Observation Results 165
15. Peach Mill Community Racial and Ethnic Demographics 172
16. Ethnic Sturcture of Peach Mill Student Population 173
17. Peach Mill Distribution of Classes 175
18. Demographic Data of Peach Mill Interview Participants 187
19. Peach Mill Structured Observation Results for All Participants 214

20. Cross-Site Comparison 218

21. Comparative Table of Observed Inclusive Behaviors of All Participants 235

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Page

1. Model explaining the process of developing theories-in-use. 42

2. Processes for evaluating Theories-of-Action. 45

3. The interrelatedness of qualitative research design components of the study. 50

4. Multi-site design illustrating the relationship between the quintain and sites. 53

5. Mountain View adequate yearly progress for 2007 and 2008. 79

6. P. T. Mackley adequate yearly progress for 2007 and 2008. 131

7. Peach Mill adequate yearly progress for 2007 and 2008. 179

8. School focus for considering continuum of services 222

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

General educators, special educators, parents, and advocacy groups spend extensive time defining inclusion in various manners. Idol (2006) explained that inclusion is defined as a process by which students with disabilities are educated in the general classroom enrolled in age appropriate classes for the entire school day. Others believe that there should be a distinction between inclusion and full inclusion. Still, some believe that appropriate placement within an available continuum of services defines inclusion. Upon closer examination, the inclusion discussion exists within three historical contextual formats: law, definitions, and philosophical thought. The legal aspect of inclusion focuses on the rules and laws that govern the implementation of inclusive practices in schools. The label "inclusion" is not actually written into the law. However, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 mandated a free and appropriate public education for every child or youth between the ages of 3 and 21 without regard to the severity or nature of students' disabilities. The historical aspect traces how educational institutions have responded to educating students with disabilities over an extensive period that is documented in history. Further, how the evolution of different labels has developed representing the general concept of inclusion is an important aspect of the historical perspective. Finally, philosophical thought addresses the values that individuals use to govern how they interpret the implementation of the law

and the foundational beliefs that dictate what they support as appropriate services for students with disabilities.

Laws that govern inclusion cannot control personal values or personal philosophies. This creates differing levels of implementation because personal values provide the catalyst that inclines educational leaders to meet the minimal requirement dictated by law or extend educational programs to maximize the implementation based on the values placed on human beings without regard to the presence of disabilities. The law versus values dilemma lies at the very foundation of the many and unresolved definitions of how inclusive practices should actually be explained.

The concept of inclusion is a widely explored international topic (Avissar, Reiter, & Leyser, 2003; Forlin, 1995; Ring & Travers, 2005; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998). As an educational practice, inclusion is controversial and extensively debated topic by stakeholders in educational communities across the globe. The research literature continues to indicate that these international discussions are raising similar questions regarding defining inclusive practices, the role of policy actors in the process, and the impact of building level leadership. The similarities of international discussion are particularly interesting considering the fact that various countries are governed by their own laws. Though laws in countries are different, the law versus values dilemma tends to permeate the inclusive education discussion. Inclusion continues to be a contentious concept in education because it requires an examination of one's social values and sense of individual worth (Wisconsin Educational Association Council [WEAC], 2001). A key

question to ponder when considering inclusion is whether all children are valued equally. Professionals in the field of education must answer this question for themselves and their school communities.

While members of boards of education, superintendents, supervisors, principals, and teachers might express a belief that all children are valued equally, the truth lies in actions found in schools and classrooms on a daily basis, not just in spoken commitments to respecting individual differences and needs. It is politically correct to espouse the belief that students are valued equally. However, this requires careful self-examinations and enactment of espoused beliefs. Many educators are not aware of the core values about differences that are attached to and guide their prioritized actions and decisions.

Collins (2003) indicated that the best way to distinguish between inclusion and other special education placement options is to delineate the distinct values and beliefs upon which inclusion is based. Zepeda and Langenbach (1999) offered the following interpretation about inclusion:

> We believe that inclusion is more than a process of having special needs students in regular classrooms. To us inclusion is a mind-set, it is a way of approaching special needs students with dignity for the talents they bring with them. We also believe that the pain, strife, and struggles of early attempts to develop inclusive classrooms (e.g., mainstreaming and REI) have enabled most educators to now provide what we refer to as "meaningful and substantive" educational opportunities in a least restrictive

environment—classrooms, period. (p. 203)

Thoughts about inclusion are further complicated because a variety of terms are used interchangeably and many stakeholders take opposite stances. A common vocabulary is necessary in order to establish common ground in any discussion about inclusion. Some of the terms that are related and used interchangeably include mainstreaming, integration, normalization, least restrictive environment, deinstitutionalization, and regular education initiative (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory [SEDL], 1995). Further, in much of the research literature there is a distinction made between inclusion and full inclusion (WEAC, 2001). Wang and Reynolds (1997) added the term progressive inclusion to the list of commonly used terms. Upon extensive examination, there is actually agreement between educators, parents, educational researchers, and academics about the essence of inclusion though they might express differences regarding how the process should be labeled and how inclusion should be achieved.

Any discussion about inclusion must include the evolution of legal thought behind the practice. Special education laws are inherently related to inclusive thought. American history indicates that legislation regarding the rights of individuals with disabilities has been necessary in order for appropriate accommodations to occur. Even with the establishment of special education legislation, data are available which indicate that slow responses to these issues characterize policy actors' behaviors.

When one examines the concept of inclusion critically, it becomes obvious that inclusion has evolved over time and has a history that encompasses complicated and

often confusing definitions and terms, legal implications, and philosophical and moral differences. The exploration of the chronology of definitions, legal actions, and philosophical thought regarding inclusion is helpful prior to undertaking meaningful research in the area. By examining what has occurred over time, it becomes possible to provide a proper context for the present status in the area of inclusive education.

Statement of the Problem

Praisner (2003) noted the importance of the exploration of attitudes when she indicated that inclusion has become a critical part of educational reform over the last two decades in order to improve educational service delivery for students with disabilities. In order for inclusion to succeed, policy actors (principals and special education teachers) must examine the congruence or incongruence between their espoused beliefs and how their beliefs are enacted. Little attention has been given to this area of study in the educational research literature. Upon examination, principals and special education teachers verbalize the politically correct perspective regarding inclusive education. It is politically correct to espouse that all students should have access to general education curriculum. The problem occurs when daily decisions made within the school environment do not represent inclusive behaviors. However, principals and special education teachers are usually unaware that disconnections exist when their espoused beliefs are not supported by their actions. Further, these policy actors' responses to the impact their decisions have on others tend to shape their behaviors even when this produces behaviors that are incongruent with espoused beliefs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the understanding and implementation of inclusive practices by elementary school principals and special education teachers in school systems in the southeastern region of the United States. Tied to this purpose is the intent to investigate whether their espoused beliefs are consistent with their practices. These purposes will be achieved through the lens of the theoretical framework Argyris and Schön (1974) developed and identified as Theories-of-Action.

Definition of Terms

This section includes definitions of terms used in this study. Several of the terms have multiple meanings some of which are controversial as well. Additionally, some of the terms have been used interchangeable, but have subtle differences that are significant in understanding the concepts under discussion. The definitions in this section represent how the terms are used in this study.

1. *Inclusion*: Inclusion is value-oriented term that refers to a broad belief system, philosophy, or commitment embracing the notion that all students should be welcomed members of a learning community, that all students are part of their classrooms even if their abilities differ (SEDL, 1995).
2. *Inclusive practice*: A set of practices employed to assure that students benefit from participating in their learning environment with non-disabled peers to the maximum

extent that is appropriate. These practices embrace different learners and convince them that they are part of a community of learners. These practices include, but are not limited to, a student-centered focus, active teaching and supervising, cooperative learning, outcome-based teaching, co-teaching, adapting teaching to students' learning styles, and computer-assisted instruction (Henley, 2004).

3. *Normalization:* The process of providing access to normal socialization experiences to individuals with disabilities and assimilating them into the community (Bailey & Plessis, 1997).
4. *Deinstitutionalization*: A systematic drive to move people with severe disabilities out of institutions and back into closer contact with the community (SEDL, 1995).

Research Questions

Appropriate research questions are necessary in order to focus the study's purpose. In addition to attending to focus, I developed the research questions cognizant of the elements outlined in the theoretical framework. This was undertaken to maximize the amount of rich data gathered from the participants at each site that are needed to accomplish the study's purpose. Thus, the following research questions were structured to realize this goal.

1. How do elementary principals and special education teachers make sense of inclusion and inclusive practices?

2. How do elementary principals and special education teachers explain inclusive implementation practices in their schools?

3. How are espoused beliefs of elementary principals and special education teachers evident in the implementation of inclusive practices in their schools?

Delimitations and Limitations

This study was delimited to elementary schools in the southeastern United States. Additionally, it was delimited to the principals and special education teachers in the three identified schools. The perceptions of general education teachers were not addressed in this study. Though this study addressed inclusion, it was further, delimited to inclusion of students identified with disabilities as defined by the IDEA of 2004.

The limitations are threefold. First, implications and any potential generalizations are limited to the elementary school environment. While trustworthiness was enhanced by the use of multiple elementary sites, middle and high school environments were excluded. Therefore, findings that appear generalizable through triangulation are limited to elementary environments, specifically the three schools in this study. Second, implications apparent in the study should be considered for the southeastern region of the United States only because practices across the country are influenced by local mores that influence beliefs and behavior. Third, findings are limited to the two groups identified for the study's focus. No assumptions should be made about any additional groups within these elementary schools.

Significance of the Study

The evolution of philosophical thought in which inclusion is situated provides a backdrop for examining current perspectives of elementary school administrators and special education teachers regarding the practice. It is important to examine the status of inclusion because though history indicates that the change process has been slow, there has been a consistent move toward increased inclusive practices in schools. The success of inclusion relies significantly on the attitudes of two groups of educators who have direct influence on inclusive practice: principals and special education teachers (Livingston, Reed, & Good, 2001; Salisbury, 2006). However, research indicates that these two groups have been studied the least (Cook, Semmel, & Gerber, 1999; Olson, Chalmers, & Hoover, 1997; Snyder, 1999). Though principals' attitudes have received more attention, very little has been done to assess the attitudes of special education teachers. Further, little attention has been given to addressing the congruence or incongruence between what these two groups of educators understand inclusion to mean and what they actually do in practice. This is a significant area of study because researchers have spent more time collecting data on what educators espouse at the expense of actually assessing what they do in practice. Sharing this insight is critical to understanding how successful inclusive education programs can increase at a faster pace than in past and recent history. Insights into this phenomenon have importance implication on an international level because similar concerns regarding inclusion are of interest in school systems around the world.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 2 of this study outlines what the research literature offers regarding the topic under investigation. It addresses the historical perspectives of inclusion through legislative processes and philosophical thought. These perspectives are addressed separately because legislation does not change philosophical thoughts held by individuals. More importantly, what individuals say they believe has to play out in their actions in order to be a valid philosophy. Studies that have provided empirical data which addressed the views of elementary principals and special education teachers on inclusion have provided systematic research results that enhance Chapter 2. Further, the theoretical framework used to provide structure to the study is provided and discussed in this chapter.

The method of the study is outlined in Chapter 3. The assumptions and rationale are presented to support the selected multi-site, case study design. Illustrations are presented using figures to tie the components of the design together and make the design clear. My role as the researcher is explained with reference to how I fit into the environments and data collection procedures. Also discussed in the chapter are data collection and data analysis procedures that were systematically designed to make public the trustworthiness of the research process.

A thorough analysis of the data occurs in Chapter 4, Chapter 5, and Chapter 6. In these chapters, I present the data gathered at the three school sites visited in this multi-site case study. Each site is addressed separately utilizing field notes, classroom and IEP meeting observations, interviews, the examination of various data sources that include

School Improvement Plans, school handbooks, principal survey, and a collection of available special education statistical data. Using these data sources, themes were developed for each school site. These themes and findings ultimately answer the three research questions which are addressed in Chapter 7. Rich descriptions are provided to allow readers to perceive the character of each of the schools.

Chapter 7 is the point at which the cross-case analysis took place. This chapter provides the opportunity to use a comparison of similarities and differences between the three sites to answer the research questions that I set out to address. There is a focus on the quintain that tied the three sites together in order to guide the discussion. This chapter sets the stage for the discussion that takes place in the concluding chapter.

In Chapter 8, conclusions are focused on what is suggested from the findings. In this chapter, I tie my finding back to the theoretical framework. Within the concluding chapter, I make suggestions for future exploration of inclusion perceptions and attitudes held by principals and special education teachers and other stakeholders in the field of education. Implications for practice are presented and discussed.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter begins with an examination of the history of inclusion based on evolved definitions, laws, and philosophical thought. The review continues with an examination of the empirical research conducted in regard to principals' and special education teachers' perceptions and understanding about inclusion. The literature review served the purpose of determining to what extent researchers have addressed the concept of inclusion from the perceptions and understandings of principals and special education teachers and the congruence or incongruence that exists between espoused beliefs and implementation behavior. An exploration of any themes or commonality of findings within the literature is discussed.

The History of Inclusive Practices

A clear history of inclusive practices exists and is documented such that construction of the chronology of activity is possible. Chronicles in history note that in the early 1900s the terms de-institutionalization and normalization were used. Later in the 1960s, integration became the term used to indicate the manner of programming for students with disabilities. At the end of the 1960s and during the 1970s stakeholders began to use the label mainstreaming. Finally, after the 1984 Regular Education Initiative the concept of full inclusion was the core belief of the initiative; however, the term inclusion became more popular after the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997 though the term has never appeared in the law. The phrase used in the

IDEA and considered to indicate inclusion is *least restrictive environment*. Progressive inclusion was a comprehensive concept used in 1997 to encapsulate the evolution of the terms.

Concurrently with the evolution of terms, the law evolved as well. From the late 1800s until the early 1900s, the law upheld exclusion. In the 1900s attending school became compulsory, increasing student enrollment in public schools. From 1950 until 1958, little litigation occurred regarding educating students with disabilities. The year 1958 brought about the enactment of a special education law (PL 85-926) causing a rise in special education related litigation. Emphasis and attention to special education laws continued to rise with the reauthorization of special education laws in 1963, 1975, 1990, 1997, and 2004.

Inclusive practices extend from a comprehensive understanding of the term that includes, but is not limited to, individuals with disabilities, gender, race, and ethnicity to focused considerations. Inclusive environments respect differences in all of these categories. The focus of this examination is primarily inclusion of students with disabilities in educational environments.

The increase of special education program options occurred as special education law mandated appropriate services for students with disabilities that were community-based. Special day schools which were deemed as the solution for the de-institutionalization movement were replaced with self-contained classes and pullout programs in community schools causing the development of a continuum of services. Henley (2004) referred to this process as “The Quiet Revolution.”

As criticism of special education programs began to surface, educational researchers began to study the efficacy of these various educational settings to contribute to informed decision-making regarding effective service delivery. Fuchs and Fuchs (1995) indicated that special education programs yielded academic success in specific disability groups. These researchers suggested that special education programs should be improved not eliminated. Marston (1996) suggested that a combined model using special education and general education services resulted in more positive results than did pull-out only or inclusion only. Carlberg and Kavale (2001) completed a meta-analysis of research studies of regular education versus special education class placements using 50 primary research studies. Their research concurred with that of Fuchs and Fuchs indicating that specific disability categories exist for which special education programs appeared more effective. To the other extreme, Lindsay (2007) concluded that the current evidence does not definitively support the positive effects of inclusion. Policy has been driven by children's rights and what is needed at this point are more evidenced-based approaches to determine the optimal level of support necessary to produce beneficial educational experiences for students with disabilities examining both social and academic benefits. Part of the evidence needed should help identify the components necessary in programs to engender educational benefit.

Inclusion Defined

Wang and Reynolds (1997) used the term progressive inclusion in order to capture the evolution of terms that has occurred over the past two decades. They expressed the belief that no matter what term is used, the dual focus of each term is to bring students

with disabilities out of special classes and schools into the general education environment and to reduce special education referrals and labels by providing for these students in the general education setting. Examining the terms that have been used to indicate inclusion in chronological order with regard to what has occurred politically and legally over time, leads to the conclusion that the terms represent incremental steps in a larger progressive inclusion process.

In the early 1800s, the solution for providing services for individuals who had hearing, visual, mental, or emotional disabilities was to place them in residential institutional settings or asylums. These placements were the primary educational services utilized until the early 1900s. When parents of students with special needs began to pressure the courts for legislation guaranteeing their children access to public schools, this signaled the beginning of the movement referred to as "deinstitutionalization" (SEDL, 1995). "Normalization" was also a term used denoting the placement of individuals with disabilities within the normal societal environment and assimilating them into the community.

In the 1960s, the word "integration" was a legal term used in the civil rights legislation prominent during the era. In *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the Supreme Court decided that the concept of "separate but equal" was improper. The Court's decision was that separate is inherently not equal. This case provided the impetus for applying civil rights legislation to special education issues. The term integration was used by special educators to convey the idea that students with disabilities should be desegregated from self-contained classrooms, special schools, pullout programs, or

residential facilities; and assimilated in the regular program in terms of physical proximity, academic, and social areas (SEDL, 1995). Collins (2003) indicated that integration describes the placement of students with disabilities into general education classrooms where the services follow the students into the classroom with the students receiving special services in the resource room, general education classroom, or some other type of pullout program. A blended classroom environment is the best description of an integrated environment.

Like integration, mainstreaming was common practice during the 1960s and the 1970s when special education litigation began to come to the forefront. "Mainstreaming" refers to the placement of students with disabilities into one or more carefully selected regular classes. In this model, students must earn the opportunity to participate in some regular classes when teachers believe they are ready to keep up with the regular curriculum with minimal modifications (WEAC, 2001). This model limits the participation of students with more severe disabilities to such activities as lunch and recess. Students with less severe manifestations of their disabilities might participate in art, gym, music, and other non-academic classes. Generally, only students with mild disabilities participate in the core academic curriculum (SEDL, 1995). In the early 1970s, *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1971) and *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* (1972) were landmark cases that set important precedents for the future. In these cases, the courts ordered the school systems to place students with disabilities in general education settings. It was the court's opinion that segregating the students violated the Equal

Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution and due process rights (Crossley, 2000). With the signing of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) in 1975, the public began to debate the issue of a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment because the law mandated this for all students with disabilities.

In 1984 during the Reagan administration, Madeleine Will, Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, launched her Regular Education Initiative. Will used this approach to argue that there should be a transformation of educational settings where general and special education are redefined by emphasizing their common aims. She argued that most students should be placed in the general education classroom for the common aim of improving students' achievement levels (Collins, 2003).

Kluth, Villa, and Thousand (2002) analyzed reports from the United States Department of Education and found that in the dozen years between 1977 and 1990, very little change was noted in service delivery for students with disabilities. More recently, these three proponents of inclusion examined similar findings released by the National Council on Disability in 2000. This period of little change and recent laws have caused more focus on the language of inclusion. This term gained popularity during the 1980s and 1990s after the 1984 Regular Education Initiative and the implementation of various amendments to special education law prior to 1997. The question of how to define inclusion has been debated again since the reauthorization of IDEA in 1997. In the educational setting, inclusion means that all students have a right to access to the regular

classroom environment without regard to the manifestation of the disability. In considering the differences between inclusion and mainstreaming, one should note that mainstreaming is interpreted as a benchmark where students earn their way from special education placements back into the regular classroom. Inclusion established that students with disabilities have the right to be in the regular classroom in the first place. Inclusion requires a more complete fusion of regular and special education programs (Robertson & Valentine, 1998).

Inclusion means that students with disabilities are educated in the school or classroom they would otherwise attend to the maximum extent appropriate. This service delivery does not require students with disabilities to keep up with the other students; however, students receive enough support in order to benefit from such a placement (WEAC, 2001). Praisner (2003) mirrored the basic belief of the Regular Education Initiative of 1984 when she explained that in an inclusive setting regular education does not relinquish responsibility for students with special needs. To the contrary, regular education and special education work cooperatively to provide a quality program for all students.

Some professionals and inclusion proponents make a distinction between inclusion and full inclusion. Full inclusion means that students with disabilities should be placed in regular classrooms full time without regard to the nature or severity of their disabilities. Further, all services for these students are provided in the regular classroom setting (WEAC, 2001). Others believe full inclusion means that students with disabilities are included to the maximum extent that such a placement would produce educational

benefit. Thus, the latter proponents do not believe there is a distinction between inclusion and full inclusion.

Inclusion and the Law

Children with disabilities were not educated in the first schools in the United States because it was deemed more convenient to exclude them from public education and allow their education to be the responsibility of their families. In 1893, the Massachusetts Supreme Court upheld the exclusion of a child based on a diagnosis of mental retardation. During the early 1900s, public schools took no responsibility for the educational concerns of students with disabilities. Similarly, in 1919 the Wisconsin Supreme Court excluded a student with a type of paralysis. During that era, both of those decisions sanctioned excluding children who did not fit what was viewed as normal (Crossley, 2000).

Urban and Wagoner (2000) indicated that after the Civil War, state legislatures passed compulsory attendance laws. The first of these laws was passed in 1852 in Massachusetts and by 1918, all 48 states in the Union had established legislation requiring school attendance. Urban and Wagoner cited statistics that indicated public support for school attendance by documenting the increase in the numbers of students attempting to enroll in public school. Crossley (2000) noted that an increase in the number of special education classes at the beginning of the 20th century coincided with the movement for compulsory school attendance. As school systems organized schools so that students advanced in grades based on academic achievement and age, students with

special needs did not fit into this system. This gave rise to the creation of more special education programs.

During the 1950s very little legislation or litigation took place regarding special education. In 1958, The Grants for Teaching in the Education of Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 85-926) provided funding to institutions of higher education in order to provide training for individuals who had a desire to teach students with mental retardation. This was the first national commitment made to support the education of students with disabilities. This law formally acknowledged the growing population of students who were in need of properly trained individuals to work toward developing their full potential (Zepeda & Langenbach, 1999).

In the 1960s, the nation began to see a rise in the attention and litigation regarding educational opportunities provided for students with special needs. In the late 1950s and 1960s, parents of children with disabilities began to mobilize in an effort to pressure legislators to pass additional laws that looked at access to public schools as a civil rights issue. In 1963 the Mental Retardation Facilities and Community Mental Health Centers Construction Act (Public Law 88-164) extended previous legislation to include students who were deaf, speech impaired, physically impaired, or experience other health impairments (Zepeda & Langenbach, 1999).

The 1960s proved to be an era of extreme criticism of special educational practices in the United States. At this point, it became a practice in this country to remove students from the general curriculum and place them in special education settings if they were from minority and/or impoverished backgrounds or had mild learning problems (Zepeda

& Langenbach, 1999). Initially, most legislation was intended to address the needs of students with mental retardation. Individuals began to question the practice of removing students from the general curriculum or neighborhood school and labeling them as exceptional. Additionally, questions were raised regarding the accuracy of diagnosis of students with special needs and the effect of homogeneous groupings in special education placements. In response to these criticisms, two major organizations became active in elevating the issues to a national level: the Council for Exceptional Children and the Association for Retarded Children.

The SEDL Executive Summary (1995) indicated that these concerns were a precursor to The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Public Law 94-142), which was signed into law by President Gerald Ford. This act mandated that all students, regardless of their disability, had a right to a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. This act led to the practice of placing students in resource rooms and self-contained classrooms in public school settings. As late as the middle 1970s, approximately one million school aged students did not attend school (National Education Association [NEA], 1999). Consequently, for much of the 20th century, educating students with disabilities in regular classrooms in their neighborhood schools was not common practice (Sack, 1999).

Public Law 94-142 was modified in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1990, the law became known as the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The amendments placed emphasis on the need for students with disabilities to be educated in their home-schools and within general education classrooms whenever possible. This law did not restrict the

settings to general education classrooms if these settings had proven inappropriate. It did and still does emphasize that a continuum of services should be available in each school district services that range from the regular classroom to institutionalization. The intent of the law is for students to receive educational benefits with their neighborhood peers in a regular school setting with appropriate support services (SEDL, 1995).

In 1997, IDEA was amended again and signed into law by President William Clinton. Previous amendments between 1990 and 1997 emphasized the addition of disability categories and the expansion of related services. The effect of these changes has resulted in an increase in numbers of students served in special education programs. In contrast, the 1997 amendment has been a vehicle through which litigation in the courts has challenged some of the language that has been vague up to this point. The concepts that have been examined extensively are *appropriate* and *least restrictive environment*. What has actually happened in the courts is that cases have been determined on a case-by-case basis; thus, what holds true for one case might not be a strong position for another. As a result, school systems have tended to operate on a compliance model rather than a result- based model (Palmaffy, 2001). When Congress enacted the amendments to IDEA in 1997, an extensive body of knowledge that addressed demonstration, practice, and research over the past two decades supported these changes. This information acknowledged that education now and in the future must maintain high academic standards for students with disabilities that are consistent with the performance standards for non-disabled students (Wright & Wright, 2003).

Palmaffy (2001) explained how the reauthorization of IDEA in 1997 was an attempt to address many criticisms long standing concerns of special education. Many critics expounded the position that students with disabilities were provided protection from disciplinary measures, which undermined public education's attempt to decrease violence in schools. These critics believed that students with disabilities were not held accountable for serious, sometimes violent, behavior. Critics also perceived that special education programs contribute to the fragmentation of the curriculum that exists in schools. They indicated that the fragmentation resulted because of the lack of integration when general education and special education programs exist and operate in isolation of each other because of funding and services. Additionally, critics have indicated that students with disabilities have been excluded from the common standards of achievement, which has produced a nationwide focus on a standards-based movement for all students. Finally, observers criticized the federal funding formulas asserting that they have encouraged over-identification and segregation of students with disabilities.

In an attempt to address these concerns, the authors of IDEA 1997 developed a plan to address discipline in a manner that would allow for more flexibility in this area. Further, federal special education policy was aligned with the prevailing standards reform movement in order to address the fragmentation issue. It was also the intent of the reauthorization to include students with disabilities into the broader standards and accountability movement. This meant that students would no longer be excluded from required large scale testing, but would have a plan outlined in their Individual Educational Plan (IEP) to allow for access to the assessment with needed

accommodations. In order to address the funding issue, Congress adjusted the funding formula in an attempt to correct the issue of over-identification of students with disabilities.

In the wake of the reauthorization of IDEA, on October 2, 2001, President George W. Bush ordered the creation of the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education. The Commission's charge was to find ways to strengthen our educational commitment to America's students with disabilities. The data collected in the report were the result of 13 hearings and meetings conducted throughout the nation. The public, principals, education officials, teachers, and parents provided valuable input. The commission stated that federal, state, and local education reform must extend to special education. Further, it suggested that the central theme of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) should be the same theme that drives the IDEA reauthorization.

Wang and Reynolds (1997) pointed out that after 1975, more and more legislation occurred that affirmed the right of all children to receive an education which has social and educational benefit and is inclusive in nature. They perceived this wave of legislation as a moral victory making the universal right to an education a legal reality rather than just a rhetorical tradition. Keaster, Melville, and Miller (1999) noted that attitudes toward and acceptance of students with disabilities are complex and can not be legislated. Further, principals and assistant principals are in key positions to influence the attitudes of those in educational settings whether positive or negative. The next step beyond the legal reality is making practices in educational settings the result of a societal commitment to do what is morally right.

Inclusion and Philosophical Thought

During the 1800s, the philosophy behind the general thinking of American society concerning educational access was that individuals who did not fit into the public schools should be removed from society and placed in institutional settings. Crossley (2000) indicated that prior to 1975 the public and government demonstrated little to no concern regarding the education of children with disabilities. For the most part, students with disabilities who were not in residential care were taught at home. This thought continued until the parents of students began to demand that their children have access to the public schools. As the number of programs increased, federal monies became available to states for funding purposes. With the increase in special education programs, increased stigma became attached to students receiving services in special educational settings. These two factors provided the impetus for educators to begin to conduct research (see Carlberg & Kavale, 1980; Madden & Slavin, 1983; Marston, 1995) to determine if students could benefit from placement in the regular education environment. According to Crossley, this research was relatively successful, leading to a movement toward inclusion. This marked the beginning of public schools examining a variety of service delivery models, which eventually evolved into a continuum of services.

In the early 1980s, schools based their philosophies on their general interpretation of the law. IDEA utilized the language of least restrictive environment, which was interpreted as mainstreaming and integration, but by the early 1990s, the interpretation evolved into what the contemporary term, inclusion. This concept represented the principle and practice of considering the regular education classroom as the placement of

first choice for all learners. Educators typically endorse a philosophical commitment to student diversity and an appreciation for that diversity. That commitment can serve to make inclusion of students with disabilities more successful (Villa & Thousand, 2003).

Inclusion challenges our unexamined notions of what we believe normal or ordinary to mean. One philosophical stance regarding inclusion offers the primary arguments that (1) segregating children in special classes or programs denies these children access to the same experiences as non-disabled peers, and (2) this segregation has not resulted in adequate education for students with disabilities (Robertson & Valentine, 1998). These proponents of inclusion believe that students with disabilities are a natural part of society and, as such, should not be segregated from others.

Another philosophy regarding inclusion maintains that it is appropriate to offer a continuum of services as long as the regular education placement is the placement of first choice. This requires a commitment of the professionals involved to examine all of the students' needs, services, and accommodations that would make them successful in the least restrictive environment. This philosophy is structured around the premise that decisions should be truly individualized depending on the students. In other words, inclusive decisions should always be child-centered. In the early 1990s, Smelter and Yudewitz (1994) supported this philosophy when they stated that one extreme is as unacceptable as the other. Taking a stance for full inclusion in the case of every student with disabilities would be no more acceptable than taking an exclusionary stance. In this case, Smelter and Yudewitz were referring to the position that full inclusion means

placing all students in the regular classroom full time without regard to the severity of their disabilities.

The National Association of School Psychologists [NASP] (2000) issued a position statement pertaining to inclusive education. This professional organization stated that it advocates for the development of inclusive programs for students with disabilities. NASP subscribed to a carefully designed program that is individualized to meet the unique needs of students. They perceived this inclusive program as a legitimate option on the special education continuum of services, which should be based on individual objectives, goals, and needs determined by IEP teams. The National Association of Secondary School Principals [NASSP] (1995) provided a list of potential benefits of inclusive programs. This list includes typical peers serving as role models for students with disabilities; the development of natural friendships within the student's home school community; learning and generalizing new academic and social skills with the natural environment; natural proportions of students with disabilities existing within the school community; all students learning to value diversity; and regular education classrooms that become better able to meet the needs of all students through more flexible curriculum, adapted instruction, additional resources, and appropriate staff development.

Kunc (1992) made an argument for inclusion by considering Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. This discussion is worthy of consideration in the 21st century. Kunc purported that Maslow's hierarchy is a paradigm for motivating learners. Maslow divided his hierarchy into five levels. According to his theory, individuals do not move up the hierarchy to a higher level until the previous level of need reaches satisfaction. The levels are

physiological, safety/security, belongingness/social affiliation, self-esteem, and self-actualization with physiological being the lowest basic need. Maslow's theory believes that *belongingness* is an essential and prerequisite human need that has to be satisfied prior to achieving a sense of self-worth. Kunc believes that though educators would agree that developing a sense of self-worth and confidence is important, the structure of school environments foster the expectation that a student should develop a sense of personal achievement independent of the child's sense of belonging. Kunc admitted that little scientific information is available about a sense of belonging, but the education community tends to understate the importance of this need.

Kunc (1992) stated that 20th century education inverted Maslow's hierarchy by placing self-esteem before belonging and thus creating a society of casualties because of this practice. In the field of education, Kunc saw segregated special classrooms and programs as a vivid example of this inversion. Students are set apart from the community and forced to earn the right to belong. He perceived the practice in special education of placing students in segregated classrooms as intermediary steps and prerequisite steps toward inclusion within general education classrooms as a validation of the perception that belonging is something earned instead of an essential human need and a basic human right.

Kunc (1992) offered a caution to those who might use Maslow's hierarchy as a rationale for including students with intensive educational needs if the inclusion is seen as an opportunity to use a more effective method of teaching skills and appropriate behavior. This view relegates inclusion as an effective strategy to minimize disabilities.

The assumption of such a view is that students with disabilities should be as normal as possible. He expounded on this perception by stating that to view some students as normal and some as in need of repair is representative of a society that values uniformity rather than diversity. Kunc said that educators who try to help every student discover their strengths and facilitate opportunities for growth and development in those areas are demonstrating the characteristics of good educators.

Kunc (1992) finally presented a perspective as to how inclusive education can provide an opportunity for actualizing Maslow's hierarchy and rediscovering belonging as a human right. He reflected on earlier beliefs that he held in the 1950s that viewed inclusion as a response to a sense of social justice for students with disabilities. His evolved thought resulted from a broader view of what he observed as social problems in schools, which have become major concerns. In his view, these problems stemmed from a society of individuals experiencing self-hate and feelings of inadequacy. He believed that this mind-set was prevalent in schools. Kunc articulated that inclusive education represents clear ways that school systems can assure that all students begin to learn that belonging is a right and not a privileged status to be earned. Kunc articulated that the fundamental principle of inclusion is the valuing of diversity within the human community. By fully embracing inclusive education, one abandons the idea that students or human beings have to be *normal* in order to contribute to the world.

Hehir (2003, 2007) expressed a more global philosophy regarding inclusion and, in fact, he believed that what society should do is move beyond the traditional ideas about inclusion and move toward addressing the pervasive negative attitudes and prejudice

toward people with disabilities in society. Hehir continued by stating that current educational practices must be re-examined because current educational outcomes for students with disabilities are not acceptable. Ending societal opinions that students with disabilities should perform the same as their non-disabled peers is the first step toward ending what Hehir refers to as *ableism*. He pointed out that instead of trying to fix a disability, schools or society should endorse the practice of students with disabilities learning to perform activities in ways that are most efficient for them. Additional steps that should be taken include maintaining special education as a specialty; promoting high standards, not high stakes; and applying concepts of universal design to schooling. Ending ableism in schooling involves implementing inclusive schools that address the diverse needs of all students. Hehir believed that disability is a natural element of human diversity.

Barth (1990) reinforced Hehir's position with the following statement:

> Differences hold great opportunities for learning. Differences offer a free, abundant, and renewable resource. I would like to see our compulsion for eliminating differences replaced by an equally compelling focus on making use of these differences to improve schools. (pp. 514-515)

When one considers the philosophical thoughts expressed by Barth in 1990, Kunc in 1992, and Hehir in 2003, similarities appear evident with the philosophical frameworks of these three advocates.

Villa and Thousand (2003) pointed out while the evolution toward inclusive education has continued, disparities continue to exist among schools, districts, and states.

Further, the nature of inclusion varies. In some environments, social inclusion exists where students with disabilities are physically placed in the general education classroom with no connection to or involvement in the academic curriculum and learning activities taught in that environment. In other educational settings modification of content, instruction, and assessment practices exist so that students can become engaged in the academic content. These discrepancies need to be reconciled, but these scenarios represent the progressive inclusion process that Wang and Reynolds (1997) referenced when they described this inclusive term. Wang and Reynolds summarized their perception of this progressive process as follows:

> The history of special education shows a steady trend of progressive inclusion, beginning with total neglect, then moving to distal arrangements for a few students (as in remote residential schools), to local special day schools, to special classes in regular schools, to resource rooms where students spend part of their school time (the remainder is spent in regular classes), and finally to full inclusion in regular schools and classes. In many places, this full continuum still exists, and some argue for its continuation over the full range. (p. 2)

In the wake of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and the reauthorization of IDEA 1997 (now IDEA 2004), the philosophy of including all students without regard to their disabilities has become more global. Students with disabilities will be included in the term diversity instead of excluded from it. The term is becoming one that applies to school restructuring which addresses the differences of all students within the school environment. The paradigm shift has truly been progressing over a long period, though it

has been a slow process. Many proponents of inclusive thought do not believe that the changes have occurred quickly enough, but changing philosophical thought is, in fact, a slow process because it involves challenging moral beliefs and values rather than merely responding to federal and state mandates. One can observe that Kunc (1990) experienced this kind of metamorphosis between 1950 and 1990 representing a span of 40 years. Moral questions that each educator must contemplate are the basis for continuing this evolution. While laws can mandate physically placing students in certain situations and can guarantee their right to participate, these laws cannot regulate whether or not students perceive themselves as belonging to their academic communities. The realization of that sense of belonging occurs only when diversity is embraced as a rich and necessary part of the learning community.

Empirical Studies

There is a dearth of literature available that empirically examines the attitudes of school administrators and special education teachers regarding inclusion though some themes can be drawn from the literature that does exist. While scarce, studies are available using a number of research designs including quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, and qualitative case studies. I have drawn from the available literature to identify what these studies generally suggest. Three themes are discussed in this section. First, administrators' espoused positive attitudes regarding inclusion when responding verbally to interview questions or in writing to survey questions. At times, these attitudes were more positive than special education teachers. Second, studies indicated that evidence of some incongruent factors existed in school environments. Third,

administrators have ambiguous understanding about special education placement. While special education teachers understand placement options, many were ambiguous about which placement they perceived as optimal. The available literature represents an international perspective which all alludes to the lack of empirical studies data in this critical area.

Espoused Positive Attitudes

Administrators espoused positive attitudes regarding inclusion when responding verbally or in writing to surveys (Bargerhuff, 2002; Cook et al., 1999; Forlin, Douglas, & Hattie, 1996; Galis, & Tanner, 1995; Kugelmass, 2003; Praisner, 2003; Ramirez, 2006; Salibury & McGregor, 2002; Tanner, Linscott, & Galis, 1996; Villa, Thousand, Meyers, & Nevin, 1996). Bargerhuff studied three elementary schools in southwest Ohio that were successful inclusive schools. Kugelmass studied three schools in the United States, England, and Portugal that have successful inclusive programs. Likewise, Salisbury and McGregor (2002) examined five schools in Pennsylvania that had the status of being inclusive schools. Salisbury and McGregor explored the administrative and contextual characteristics of these elementary schools. From these 11 schools examined by these four researchers spanning three countries, the theme, which arose as key to the success of inclusive practices, was a commitment to inclusive education because of the values and attitudes held by the leader and engendered in the school community. These values and beliefs were specifically described by Bargerhuff as sharing a strong belief of the intrinsic value of every human being. Keyes, Hanley-Maxwell and Capper (1999) identified the same theme regarding a belief in the intrinsic value of every human being

develop in their research and labeled it “spirituality.” Salisbury and McGregor noted that all the principals they studied used a process of reflective inquiry with the school teams in order to promote changes in the cultures of their schools because they realized that changing attitudes, beliefs, and practices imply deeper levels of change.

Olson, Chalmers, and Hoover (1997) studied general education teachers who were identified by principals and special education teachers as skilled in including students with disabilities in their classrooms. The main theme that developed in this study corroborated the themes developed in the previously referenced studies. The general education participants interviewed expressed humanistic attitudes regarding individual worth.

Turner and Traxler (1995) gained insight into the perceptions of parents, teachers, and principals during the implementation of an inclusion pilot project in two suburban school districts in Indiana. Surveys administered to parents and teachers provided data for analysis using descriptive statistics. Administrator perspectives were elicited using interview protocols to garner additional support for the findings obtained from the surveys. The researchers indicated that their data suggested that collaboration among colleagues, curriculum modification, and implementing inclusion with a positive attitude contributed most to a successful program.

Praisner (2003) provided a more recent examination of the attitudes of principals and extended her appraisal to include a consideration of attitudes toward inclusion and placement perceptions. This study acknowledged the need to look beyond espoused beliefs. The survey used in the study provided data in the areas of inclusiveness and

attitude. A statistically significant positive relationship was established between the two variables. In other words, when principals' surveys indicated positive attitudes about inclusion, their Inclusiveness Scores were high as well. It was notable that eleven administrators declined to answer the survey section, which yielded the Inclusiveness Score stating that they believed that placement decisions should be made on an individual basis and not as a general concept. While their explanations might have been genuine, it is possible that they were reluctant to commit themselves to making inclusion choices because of their perceived notions about the intent of soliciting such data. This last inferred insight provides a transition into a discussion of the second theme. Horrock, White, and Roberts (2008) gave additional support to the connection between attitude and inclusiveness in their survey research in which a positive correlation between principal's attitudes and the level of placement recommendations for students with autism was demonstrated.

Incongruent Factors

Some studies indicated that there was evidence of some incongruent factors exhibited in school environments when limited explorations considered espoused and enacted beliefs. Studies that considered teachers (both general and special education) and administrator attitudes or perceptions indicated that there was positive espoused administrative support for inclusion (Cook et al., 1999; Powell & Hyle, 1997; Villa et al., 1996). Surprisingly, Cook et al. compared the attitudes of principals and special education teachers and found a significantly higher positive attitude among principals regarding improved academic achievement of mildly disabled students in general

education than among special education teachers. These researchers emphasized the fact that while principals were positive about inclusion and student achievement, they did not strongly support protecting resources set aside for implementing inclusive practice, nor did they perceive general education teachers as having the skills needed for successful inclusion. The researchers raised the possibility that principals responded in a manner that suggested a political response to what they perceived as desirable rhetoric.

Keaster (1999) added support to the notion of inconsistencies regarding attitudes and enactment. This research suggested that the majority of administrators in their study had a less that positive attitude regarding inclusion though they did acknowledge benefits for students with disabilities. They described these benefits as including providing challenging academic instruction and improved social skills. While administrators expressed strong philosophical statements about the rights of students with disabilities to be included in the general education classroom, they expressed incompatible views about their perceptions of negative impact on general education teachers, the impact on general education students, and the benefits to students with disabilities. In short, their espoused beliefs about the concept of inclusion was not congruent with their stated beliefs that general education was not the most appropriate means of education for students with disabilities.

Brotherson, Sheriff, Milburn, and Schertz (2001) pointed out that their study of elementary principals had unspoken aspects that were worthy of consideration. The elementary principals interviewed did not speak of the importance of building friendships or social interaction from which elementary students with disabilities would benefit.

While they discussed their visions or roles in implementing quality inclusive programs, they did not verbalize the importance of building a sense of community for young students as a core belief in their visions. Brotherson et al. suggested that this missing information was contradictory to what Strike (1999) and other research literature says about the need for a strong sense of community for students in quality inclusive schools.

Prom (1999) studied general educators' perceptions about inclusion. Though not specifically targeting principals or special education teachers, the researcher's findings were significant to the concept of congruency. Her data indicated that there was a high level of inconsistency between what teachers perceived (by ratings) as lack of meaningful participation in the class expectations by students with disabilities and what videotaping of the learning activity revealed had actually occurred.

Ambiguous Understandings

Another prominent theme that appears in the empirical data is that administrators have ambiguous understandings about special education placement and lack passion regarding enacted beliefs. Doyle (2001) explored how 19 school administrators perceived the inclusion of students with disabilities into general education classrooms. Data were gathered using interviews conducted in a metropolitan area composed of four school districts. Findings indicated that these administrators viewed inclusion as another placement along the special education continuum of services. These administrators did not visualize inclusion beyond mainstreaming and expected students to fit into what was already in place. None of the administrators interviewed in the study were able to

articulate a vision for change. The researcher indicated that the administrators included in the study were reacting to mandates for inclusion.

Salisbury (2006) conducted a study utilizing nine schools from three school districts that differed in their economics, histories, size, and various components of diversity of which one was special education reform. Salisbury's intent was to extend the research on investigations using principals' perspectives as primary informants. The researcher believed that contributions to the field from principals already engaged in restructuring for more inclusive environments would provide valuable data regarding definitions of inclusion, description of successful implementation, and the relationship between principal attitude and level of implementation. Salisbury employed interviews and quantitative indices of inclusiveness to discover patterns in the inclusive elementary schools under study. Findings from this study indicated that the schools varied considerably in their level of implementation of inclusive practices. Second, schools meeting criteria as partially inclusive implemented a wider range of support in general education for more students reflecting stronger support from administrators. Third, administrative views of inclusion affected the degree of implementation. Finally, the data collected regarding indices of quality had no significant relationship to inclusive efforts.

By examining the literature on empirical studies, commonalities were identified that provide the impetus for further examination of school principals' and special education teachers' understandings and perceptions about inclusion and the implementation behaviors of these educators. First, the literature reviews within studies noted the limited number of studies that examine principals' and special education teachers' perspectives.

A literature search by this researcher further confirmed the limited amount of empirical research. Second, empirical studies recognized the unclear understanding of what inclusion means though many educators are comfortable with the concept of a continuum of service models available with consultative support. In addition, studies have indicated that in some instances positive attitudes about inclusion relates to the severity of the disability (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998; Downing et al., 1997; Dyal et al., 1996; Praisner, 2003; Roll-Pettersson, 2008). Third, the studies recognized that in some cases statements affirmed by respondents were contradictory and created questions as to whether or not participants recognized a lack of congruency in their perspectives (Cook et al., 1999; Praisner, 2003). Fourth, principals and special education teachers expressed concerns about the lack of training and preparation of general education teachers for inclusion and the need for teaming and collaboration. Finally, several studies support the stated significance of this study. These studies support the notion that educators (principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers) in successful inclusive environments have clear and strong beliefs that every human being has intrinsic value and this belief drives a strong commitment to inclusive opportunities in an inclusive school community. These themes set the stage for examining school dynamics where educators purport to provide maximized inclusive environments. Further, an examination of practices and beliefs allowed the researcher to consider whether schools need to develop different levels of awareness to maximize inclusion within school environments.

Theoretical Framework

Anfara and Mertz (2006) provided a definition of a theoretical framework as "any empirical or quasi-empirical theory of social and/or psychological processes, at a variety of levels (e.g. grand, mid-range, and explanatory), that can be applied to the understanding of phenomena" (p. xxvii). This definition provides the perspective for interpreting how the theoretical framework used in this study provides the lenses through which the examination will progress. Understanding the theoretical framework is critical to properly focusing the data collection, research questions, and analysis. Thus, a discussion of the theoretical framework follows in this section.

Argyris and Schön (1974) added to the literature on organizational theory. They proposed theories-of-action and offered extensive explanations on how they perceived the intricacies of how humans behave when individuals interact in organizational settings. Theories-of-actions are the mechanisms by which we link our thoughts with our actions. These theorists believed that there are two theories of action, which can be labeled espoused theories and theories-in-use. Espoused theories are those that individuals say they follow. Theories-in-use are those that can be inferred by an individual's actions. Theories-in-use are more likely to be unknown to us. Within an individual, these two theories might be consistent or inconsistent and the person may or may not be aware of any inconsistency. Moreover, people are often unaware of their theory-in-use. Argyris, Putnam, and Smith (1985) explained the work of Argyris and Schön in 1974, which further suggested that what people do is not accidental. Rather, their actions are designed.

Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical concept of Argyris, Putnam, and Smith. Argyris and Schön (1974) stated the following:

> When someone is asked how he would behave under certain circumstances, the answer he usually gives is his espoused theory of action for that situation. This is the theory of action to which he gives allegiance, and which, upon request, he communicates to others. However, the theory that actually governs his actions is this theory-in-use. (pp. 6-7)

Dick and Dalmau (2000) outlined the elements involved in theories of action by Argyris and Schön (1974) to include action strategies, consequences for self, consequences for others, governing values, and action strategy effectiveness. Descriptions of these elements are as follows and illustrated in Figure 1:

Action Strategies: These are the behaviors in which we engage to manage our immediate surroundings, especially our social surroundings. Argyris would say that they are to keep a governing value within an acceptable range: to maintain an important belief.

Consequences for self: These are the end effects for ourselves of our action strategy and of the response it engenders in others. It often includes what we feel obliged to do or prevented from doing.

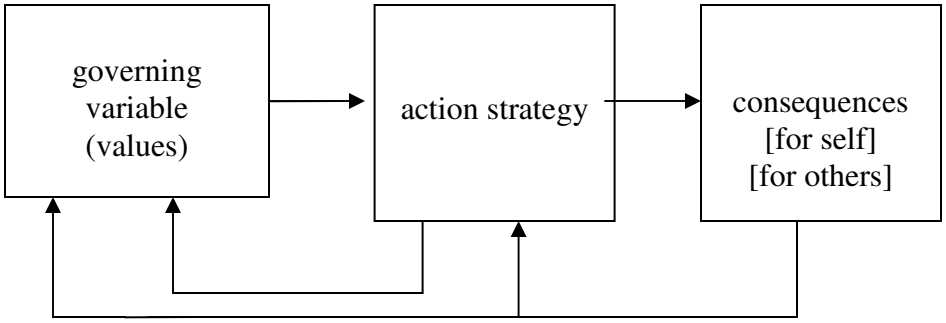

Figure 1. Model explaining the process of developing theories-in-use.

*N*ote. From *Action Science: Concepts, Methods, and Skills for Research and Intervention* (p. 84), by C. Argyris, R. Putnam, and D. Smith, 1985, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Consequences for others. These are the end effects for others of our action strategy and the response it engenders in them often they include what they feel obliged to do or prevented from doing. "Others" can include people, groups, organizations or systems.

Governing values: Governing values or governing variables are constancies which we seek to keep within acceptable ranges. They are goals we seek to satisfy, beliefs we seek to operationalize or defend, values we seek to express…

Action strategy effectiveness: This denotes the extent to which our behaviors (our action strategies) lead us to confirm the "rightness for us" of our governing values. The effectiveness of our action strategy is judged in relation to the governing values of either our espoused theory or our theory-in-use. (p. 3)

These outlined elements interact whether the action theory is an espoused theory or theory-in-use. Dick and Dalmau (2000) suggested that when an individual becomes aware of a mismatch between ideal-self (espoused) and actual-self (in-use), options for increasing effectiveness are multiplied allowing maximum self-satisfaction, as well as, increased satisfaction of others. Argyris (1985) explained that over time the governing values, action strategies, and consequences become propositions. The propositions form theories of action with which we plan and act out our intentions. These theories are implicit and highly skilled. The level of skill results from the fact that they are learned in

early life. These values govern human actions until a threat exists. It is at this time that our actions are likely to be inconsistent with our espoused intentions and values.

Figure 2 conceptualizes how theories are evaluated for congruence and incongruence. Using this evaluation, organizations and individuals can evaluate their Theories-of-Action in those situations requiring actions and decisions.

Argyris and Schön (1974) provided the following definitions for important terms related to evaluating theories of action:

> Internal consistency means the absence of self-contradiction…. The most important kind of consistency lies among the governing variables of the theory that are related to assumptions about self, others, and the behavioral setting. Each of these variables has a range that is acceptable; within that range, there are levels of preference….If two or more such variables are internally incompatible in a particular context, one cannot achieve as high a level of preference for both of them taken together as one can for each of them taken separately. If we call such a relationship *incompatibility*, we can reserve the term *internal inconsistency* for the special case in which one variable will fall out of its acceptable range if the other is brought into the acceptable range….Congruence means that one's espoused theory matches his theory-in-use. A second (and much-used) meaning of congruence is allowing inner feelings to be expressed in actions. These two meanings are complementary and show an

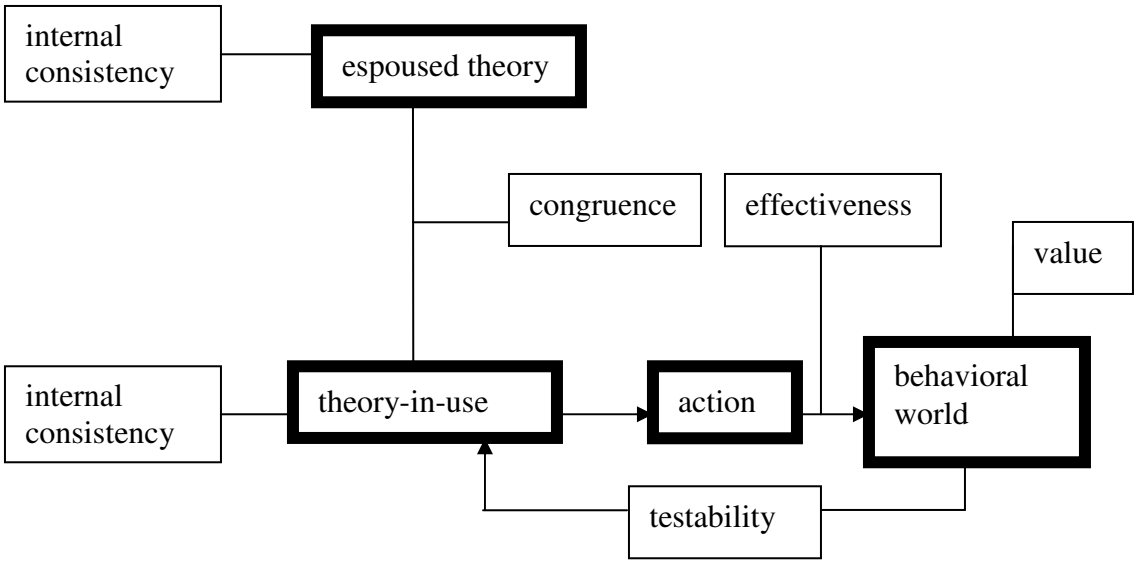

Figure 2. Processes for evaluating Theories-of-Action.

Note. From *Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness*. (p. 21), by C. Argyris and D. Schön, 1974, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass. Copyright 1974 by Jossey-Bass. Reprinted with permission of the author.

integration of one's internal (what one who is aware of my feelings and beliefs would perceive) and external (what an outsider who is aware only of my behavior would perceive) state. (pp. 20-23)

Chapter Summary

A search of the research literature revealed limited empirical studies regarding the attitudes about inclusion held by elementary principals and special education teachers. The empirical studies available represented a variety of research methodologies (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998; Cook et al., 1999; Downing, Eichinger, & Williams, 1997; Doyle, 2001; Dyal, Flynt, & Bennett-Walker, 1996; Landers, 1995; Powell & Hyle, 1997; Praisner, 2003; Prom, 1999; Ramirez, 2006; Salisbury, 2006; Salisbury, & McGregor, 2002; Turner & Traxler, 1995; Villa, Thousand, Meyers, & Nevin, 1996). The studies available indicated the importance of this area of inquiry because of the role-played by principals and special education teachers as policy actors whether they serve at elementary or secondary levels. However, the importance of what occurs at the elementary level is magnified by the fact that this level represents the formative years for learners.

This is a significant area of study because researchers have spent more time collecting data on what educators espouse rather than assessing what they do in practice. This gap in the literature needs further exploration because taking an approach that requires these policy actors to align what they espouse and what they enact will influence the rigor with which educational leaders implement successful inclusion programs by assisting them

with analyzing their real beliefs about creating inclusive environments in their school communities. Cook et al. (1999) suggested that research utilizing direct observation relating the attitudes of school personnel to their behavior is also necessary to extend the research literature. Praisner (2003), as well, suggested that factors related to and impacting placement perceptions warrant additional research.

Using Theories-of-Action as a framework for this study presents implications that will contribute to an understanding of the dynamics involved in securing an accurate appraisal of beliefs and behaviors from the educators under investigation. Further, appraising the data in light of this theoretical framework will assist in making more meaningful analysis and recommendations regarding participant behavior. Now, more than ever, in light of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, educational leaders, both principals and special education teachers, need to discover their unspoken beliefs about student worth to decide if they are implementing inclusive environments to the maximum extent that is appropriate and possible.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Assumptions and Rationale for a Qualitative Approach

This study's boundaries were within the context of elementary schools. The purpose of this study was to explore the understanding and implementation of inclusive practices by elementary school principals and special teachers in school systems in the southeastern region of the United States. Tied to this purpose was the intent to investigate whether their espoused beliefs were consistent with their practices. While certain laws must be followed, the level of success of implementing optimal inclusive environments relies on practices in which principals and special educators engage. Among the strengths noted by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004), the following support the use of qualitative methods to realize the stated purpose of this study:

- The data are based on the participants' own categories of meaning.
- It is useful for studying a limited number of cases in depth.
- It is useful for describing complex phenomena.
- The researcher can study dynamic processes (e.g., documenting patterns of behavior).
- It can determine how participants interpret "constructs." (p. 20)

Merriam (1998) emphasized that qualitative case study design fulfills the research agenda if the researcher is interested in interpretation, discovery, and insight. The nature of the present inquiry relates to these aims outlined by Merriam.

Type of Design

Figure 3 illustrates how the various components of this study are interrelated. Maxwell (2005) suggested that qualitative research design parts are interrelated and must be approached as an interacting whole requiring the researcher to revisit each component as the study progresses. This allows the researcher to consider or assess the implications of the component parts. Because of the interactions of the various components, the research process is not static or linear and the researcher must react to circumstances under which the study is conducted. I have provided this illustration for the current qualitative, multi-site case study based on the concept outlined by Maxwell. I used the interrelated research process to examine each site under study. After examining each site individually, I considered the three sites as an aggregated whole. Approaching the data in this interactive manner followed the ontological precept of qualitative design. In qualitative design, the nature of knowledge or reality is an expression of multiple truths. This multi-site, qualitative case study uncovered the truths associated with the espoused and enacted beliefs of principals and special education teachers relative to inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education environment.

Many qualitative researchers offer definitions for case studies. Yin (2003) stated, "A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13). Stake (2006) referred to the phenomenon or condition under study as a *quintain*. Stake used this label to designate the phenomenon that ties multi-

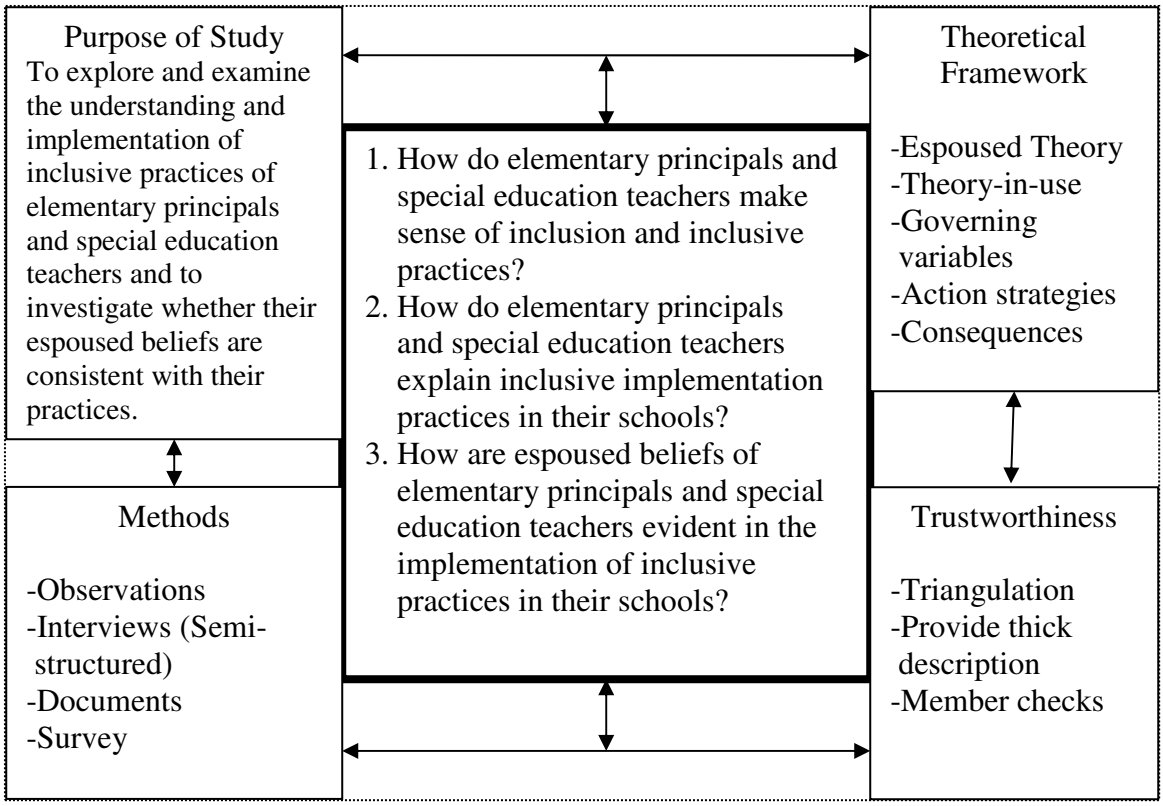

Figure 3. The interrelatedness of qualitative research design components of the study.

sites or cases together. He explained this concept by stating that in multi-site case study the intent of the study is to seek to understand the quintain. In order to understand it better, we study single cases selected because of the manifestation of the phenomenon under study within these various sites. The analysis of the quintain consists of making comparisons regarding similarities and differences between the sites under study with the goal of gathering new insights about the quintain.

A multi-site, qualitative case study design using three sites provided the opportunity to examine the quintain under exploration. The overall intent of this study was instrumental. Stake (2006) explained that instrumental case studies are those studies that go beyond the case itself. Since multi-site studies exhibit a strong interest in the quintain that ties the sites together, the purpose tends to be primarily instrumental in this type design. Though not a rigid rule, Stake suggested that the appropriate number of cases or sites in this type of study should be at least four and not more than 10 in order to maximize the benefits of this design. Keeping the number within the range of four to 10 allows for a meaningful level of interactivity. Herriott and Firestone (1983) explained multi-site, qualitative case study design by stating, "...multisite qualitative studies address the same research questions in a number of settings using similar data collection and analysis procedures in each setting. They consciously seek to permit cross-site comparison without necessarily sacrificing within-site understanding" (p. 14).

I collected sufficient data in order to provide thick description that allowed me to develop themes regarding individual sites while examining the phenomenon across sites to address the research questions which relate to the quintain. The study intended to

illuminate the sense that elementary principals and special education teachers make out of inclusion in their schools while looking to see if congruence or incongruence between espoused theory and theory-in-use influence the level of inclusionary practice evident in school settings both individually and collectively.

Yin (2003) suggested that replication logic is essential to multi-site case studies. The overall concept of replication in qualitative research is the same as replication in quantitative research in that the same procedures are repeated more than once in order to verify findings by producing the same or very similar results. Qualitative researchers intend to replicate qualitative procedures across site or cases to either produce a literal replication in which similar results are predicted or produce a theoretical replication in which opposite results are predicted for theoretical reasons. Thus, it is apparent that a multi-site case study requires the structure of a theoretical framework prior to undertaking the study as well as a data schedule and outline of the procedures for collection (see Appendix A).

Figure 4 illustrates the description of a multi-site, instrumental, qualitative case study offered by Stake (2006). The sites are tied together by the quintain or phenomenon. The same procedures for data collections and data sources are utilized at each site. Questions, themes, findings and analysis, and implications intersect with the quintain lines in order to demonstrate that these components were examined within sites and between sites.

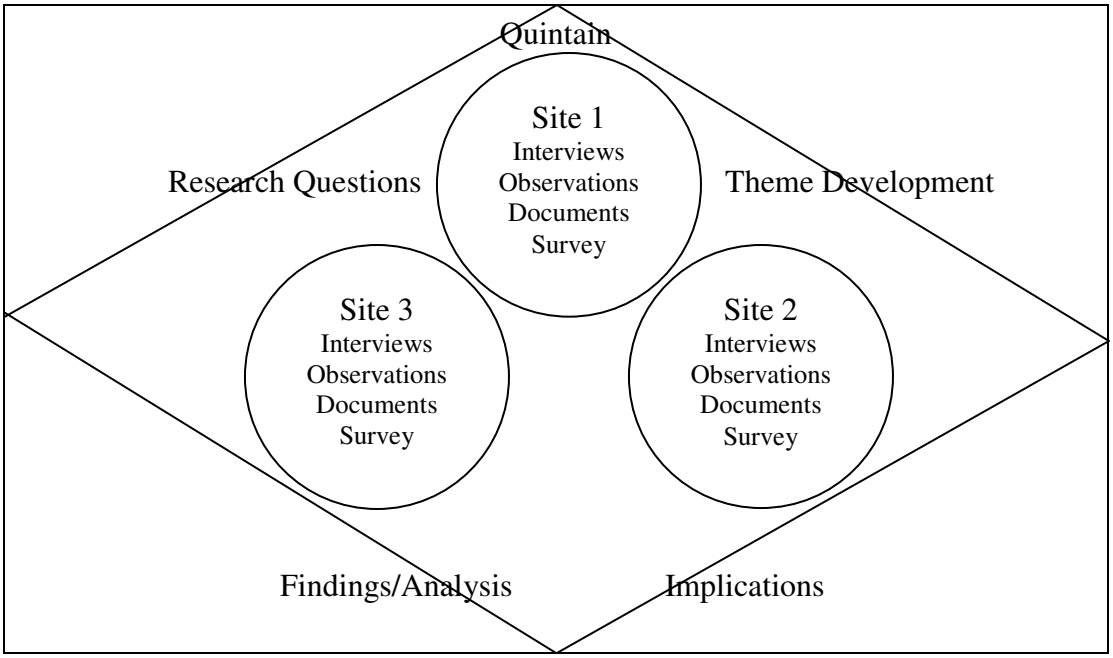

Figure 4. Multi-site design illustrating the relationship between the quintain and sites.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I served as a non-participant observer and interviewer. However, if the opportunity to become a participant observer became possible in some, if not all, settings, I reserved the right to exercise the flexibility available in qualitative designs and become a participant. In qualitative research from an epistemological perspective, the researcher does not stand apart from the research. Thus, participation in the setting is appropriate and can evolve during the research process. While I was able to participate in a staff meeting, parent conference, RTI team meeting, and four IEP meetings, I served as a non-participant at each of the three sites visited in this study.

The bias involved in this study develops from the fact that I have over 25 years of experience in the field of special education and I admit some preconceived notions about how I believe administrators address inclusion in their schools. However, I do not claim any notions about special education teachers. Searching the literature and reading studies has required me to examine my own position. From this perspective, my bias might be somewhat ambiguous and thus not prone to impact or slant the data collection and analysis. Researcher integrity includes exposing bias such that readers can draw their own conclusions from rich descriptions provided in the cases. In the role of non-participant observer and interviewer, I gave attention to exhibiting qualities discussed by Merriam (1998) which include sensitivity, good communication skills, and the ability to handle and make sense out of ambiguity. These specific qualities apply to being a participant observer as well.

Ghesquière, Maes, and Vandeberghe (2004) referred to the researcher as a research instrument. They posit that subjectivity plays a part in the interactions between the researcher and the participants because the data cannot exist within a research context that is independent of the researcher. These data are a result of the context and therefore, the quality of these data correlates with the quality of the relationship between the researcher and the research participants. Since the subjective condition exists, it must be considered typical of the reciprocal nature of the qualitative methodology. This condition indicates the need for documented, systematic data collection and analysis procedures that are made available for public scrutiny (Anfara et al., 2002; Constas, 1992).

Data Collection Procedures

Schools from systems in the southeastern United States were the selected sites for the study. I used purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2005; Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 2006; Weiss, 1994) to identify participants for the study. The goal for using this method of sampling was to identify specific cases that provide optimal settings in which to examine the phenomenon through the lens of my theoretical framework: theories of action. Merriam, as well as Stake (1994), identified or described two levels of sampling necessary for qualitative case studies: selecting the cases and selecting participants within the cases. First, to select the cases, I identified elementary schools in selected school systems that have full continuums of special education services in the schools. I used contacts in the state department of education to identify schools with full continuums of special education services available in their buildings. The service options included some combination of the following: (1) full-time general education services with support, (2)

instruction in the general education classroom for most of the day, (3) general education instruction and direct resource support during the day, (4) part-time self-contained special education class, and (5) special class for most or all of the school day. More than one option allows the participants to have more choices at various levels available for special education student services. Second, sampling within the cases included identification of the principal and special education teachers in the buildings. I asked principals responsible for administering special education in their schools to participate. If more than one principal assumed that responsibility, each one received an invitation to participate. I invited three to five special education teachers in each building to be respondents.

Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews (audio recorded), documents, administrator surveys, and observations provided appropriate data sources. I gathered all data between January and May 2008. Interviews were recorded with a digital recorder and appropriate software was used to transcribe interviews and code the content using the computer and qualitative data analysis software. I observed each participant prior to the interview. This procedure assured that behavior could be observed prior to any cues that might be provided by the nature of the interview questions. After all participants were observed and interviewed once, a second observation was conducted with each of the principals because principals spend less direct time with students who have disabilities, but their daily leadership behavior sets the stage for the entire school climate. The outlined interview and observation procedures provided an opportunity to reduce reflexivity as defined by Merriam (1998).

Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews depend on an interview protocol that is a mixture of structured questions and questions that are more open-ended. I used this process to elicit specific information that I wanted to explore, but at the same time access participants' unsolicited experiences and perspectives. The analysis of interview protocols outlined in Table 1 provided the assurance that the principal and special education teacher interview protocols represented a semi-structured questioning plan. This matrix allowed me to balance the types of questions constructed.

Merriam (1988) stated that the key to collecting good data is dependent upon the researcher's ability to ask good questions. Merriam provided two purposes for preparing a list of good questions. First, good questions provide motivation for the respondents to share their knowledge. Second, good questions allow for the production of data that address the research objectives and generate specific, measurable language. The works of Patton (1990) and Strauss, Schatzman, Bucher, and Sabshin (1981) identified the kinds of questions that stimulate respondents to provide different kinds of information.

Table 1 provides an analysis of the kinds of questions that provided stimulation for data generation in this study. Table 1 includes a combination of the kinds of question from both Patton (1990) and Strauss et al. (1981). Both the administrator interview protocol (see Appendix B) and the special education teacher protocol (see Appendix C) have five questions that elicited data regarding experience and behavior. These questions questions on the teacher and principal protocols required responses that are indicative of

Table 1

Matrix of Interview Questions

Types of Questions	Interview Protocols		Survey
	Principal	Teacher	
Experience/behavior	1, 2, 3, 4, 6	1, 2, 3, 4, 6	
Opinion/value	9, 10	9, 10	Sec. 3: 1-10
Feelings	13	13	Sec.4 of Survey
Knowledge	8, 11, 5	8, 11, 5	
Hypothetical	7	7	
Ideal Position	-	14	
Interpretive	12	12	

opinions and values about inclusion. Additionally, principals provided additional information about their values on the identified sections from the administrator survey. questions on the teacher and principal protocols required responses that are indicative of opinions and values about inclusion. Additionally, principals provided additional information about their values on the identified sections from the administrator survey. On both protocols, one question is open-ended in order to allow the interviewees to offer additional information, which could elicit opinions, feelings, or values. The knowledge questions on both protocols provided an opportunity for principals and special education teachers to provide specific content knowledge and knowledge about the school. These questions provided the opportunity to examine whether or not principals and special education teachers in the same school have similar or different perceptions about the inclusion opportunities in their schools.

The balance of questions by categories presented on the principal interview protocol and the special education teacher protocol appears to provide a structure that will contribute to the researcher's quest to collect rich, descriptive data. On initial examination, it appears that the purpose of the study and research questions appropriately guided the development of the interview protocol questions.

I tied the interview questions on both the administrator and the special teacher protocols to the theoretical framework as suggested by Kvale (1996). I accomplished this by examining each component of the framework and placing the questions within a table that will elicit information to pinpoint that component within the responses to the questions asked. I followed the same examination process to determine how this

coordinated information addresses the research questions. Further, I related the sections on the administrator survey that addressed components outlined in the theoretical framework.

Table 2 demonstrates the established relationship between the theoretical framework, research questions, protocols, and survey questions. Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002) explained that by cross-referencing the research questions and interview questions, the researcher could make certain that the right interview questions are asked and other appropriate data sources are reviewed in order to generate data that are relevant to the study's purpose and research questions. By utilizing tables and matrices to account for the methods and design of the study, I increased the level of integrity associated with good qualitative research. Using interviews and observation allowed me to formulate implications and conclusions pertinent to the framework used to structure my study: Theories-of-Action (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Observation data reveal theories-in-use while interviews reveal espoused theory. Interviews, however, provide insight regarding how individuals contextualize their behavior revealing what action strategies they utilize. Concerning interviews Seidman (1998) provided the following insight:

> Interviewing provides access to the context of people's behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meanings of that behavior. As basic assumption in in-depth interviewing, research is that the meaning people make of their experiences affects the way they carry out that experience … Interviewing

Table 2

Relationship between Theoretical Framework, Research Questions, Survey Observations, and Interview Questions

Element of Theory	Research Questions	Interview Questions
	1. How do elementary principals	A-7. 8, 9, 10
Governing Variables (Values)	and special teachers make	T-7, 8, 9, 10, 14
	sense of inclusion and	Survey- Sec. 3:1-10/
	inclusive practices?	Sec. 4
Action Strategies	2. How do elementary principals	A-1, 2, 3, 4
	and special education teachers	T- 1, 2, 3, 4
	explain inclusion implementation	
	practices in their schools?	
Consequences for Self	3. How are espoused beliefs	A-5, 6
Consequences for Others	of elementary principals and	T-5, 6
	special education teachers	
	evident in the implementation	
	of inclusive practices in their schools?	
Action Strategy Effectiveness	Determined through interview	A-11, 12, 13
	and [observation]	T-11, 12, 13

allows us to put behavior in context and provides access to understanding their action. (p. 10)

Observations

As is the case in interviews, likewise, there are ranges of structure in observations. The lowest level of observation involves scanning the environment and recording what is happening. This is in contrast with a more structured observation where an observation protocol that focuses on certain persons, behaviors, or certain events is utilized. I employed a combination of the two kinds of observation. My focus for structured observations involved the behavior of the principals and special education teachers in situations that required issues and decisions relating to students with disabilities (see Appendix D). Concurrently, observations that span the academic environment to ascertain the school culture potentially provided valuable information related to the phenomenon under examination.

Field notes provided the best means of recording observational data accurately. In order to add to the rich description desired in this study, field notes are an integral part of the data. Merriam (1998) suggested that researchers use the tool of observation for several reasons. Observations might reveal routines within the context that provide some level of understanding. An observer might document specific incidents or behaviors that stimulate investigation within the case. As addressed previously, observations might triangulate or refute information shared in interviews. Lastly, participants might exhibit behaviors dictated by the context that they would be reluctant to verbalize during an

interview. All of these reasons are relevant to the purpose of the present study and the research questions under investigation.

Documents

Examination of documents adds to the collection of data for the study. While many special education documents are confidential, general data that relates to statistical information can provide objective examinations of procedural practices in which the identified school sites engage. I used the initial site studied to gauge the kinds of documents sought from the additional sites though I considered all documents available at each site. Special education statistical charts offer the opportunity to examine the number of direct service hours compared to the number of students receiving special education services in each school. While IEPs are confidential documents, examining some with demographic data removed provides the opportunity to consider modifications, recommendations, and services provided to students with disabilities to various degrees of severity. If available, studying the results of parent surveys that evaluate special education services in the school would indicate generally perceived attitudes regarding quality of inclusive efforts. In addition, reading the School Improvement Plan provided the opportunity for me to look for language or schools goals that indicated inclusive actions and attitudes.

Survey

Employing portions of a survey or some modifications of the survey format is valuable to the study because the information produced will provide another means of

triangulating the themes that are developed. Praisner (2003) used a survey (see Appendix E) to examine the attitudes of elementary principals toward inclusion. I administered, with permission from the author, two sections of her survey to address attitudes about inclusion (see Appendix F). This was valuable to the data collection process used in this study. While surveys are often perceived as more useful when soliciting information from large groups of participants, I believe that this particular survey information provided an additional and significant data source from which to present the findings. Survey data provided a source to determine if what the principals say in the interviews is supported by how they respond to the portions of the survey used in the study.

Table 3 provides an easy reference to the variety of data sources available to triangulate the findings. These sources served as support for theme development as the analysis process progressed. Using this matrix made it easier for me to gather data that are specific to my research questions. By using interview question protocols, surveys, observations, and documents, there is a balance of semi-structured responses and unstructured responses. Supporting the observational data collection with structured and unstructured procedures allowed me the flexibility to look for certain behaviors that are indicative of positive inclusive behaviors. At the same time, I noted those behaviors that occur in an unstructured observation that might be positive behaviors or I included observed behaviors that impede the implementation of inclusive practices. The importance of the observational data is significant because the data allowed me to consider theories-in-use. These data provided the study's participants the occasion to

Table 3

Matrix of Data Sources

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Observations	Documents	Surveys
1. How do elementary principals and special education teachers make sense of inclusion and inclusive practices?	X	X	X	X
2. How do elementary principals and special education teachers explain inclusion implementation practices in their schools?	X	X		X
3. How are espoused beliefs of elementary principals and special education teachers evident in the implementation of inclusive practices in their schools?	X	X	X	X

evaluate themselves based on theories-of-action once they have the opportunity to participate in the member check process.

Yin (2003) outlined strengths and weaknesses for various data sources of evidence that are available to substantiate findings set forth in qualitative studies. Yin suggested no single data source is best, but several can compliment each other and strengthen the support for one's findings. The strengths and weaknesses served as a guide for deciding which sources provide support for one's findings. Further, the strengths and weaknesses served as a guide for deciding which of these sources appear to provide the best means of collecting data for the purpose of this study. Table 3 indicates the data sources that served as valuable data sources for this study.

Interviews allow the researcher to focus directly on the topic. Since interviews provide perceived casual inferences, this information source presents the opportunity to gather valuable data that will directly address espoused beliefs. One weakness of this source is response bias. This occurs when the interviewee attempts to articulate politically correct rhetoric (Yin, 2003). While this would be detrimental for most studies, it provided valuable information with regard to the purpose of this study. Reflexivity (interviewee gives what interviewer wants to hear), like response bias, provides a basis for considering behaviors observed during the regular routines and meetings that occur during the school day.

According to Yin (2003), direct observation represents reality because it covers events in real time and it covers the context of the event. However, it is time consuming, costly, selective, and observation might cause events to proceed in a different manner

than what would occur naturally. It is necessary to keep this particular bias under consideration when the observation data is analyzed. It appears that the interview questions are needed to counteract certain weaknesses recognized as inherent in the observation process.

Yin (2003) explained that documents are unobtrusive, exact, and represent broad coverage. Documents are also stable. However, accessibility might be limited and the bias of the author of the document might be unknown. The accessibility issue is a likely factor in this study because most special education documents are confidential. Thus, I used documents that focus primarily on school statistics, which are more group specific than student specific. Statistical data that indicates the amount of time students with disabilities are served in general education is indicative of actual general education participation. In addition, I attempted to examine other documents that would provide some clues about the emphasis placed on diversity (which includes students with disabilities) in the schools under study.

Data Analysis Procedures

Anfara et al. (2002) suggested using the process of code mapping to bring structure to the data. Sharing the process followed allows readers to understand the system used to engage in data interpretation and theme development resulting in public disclosure of analysis procedures. The current study will use this process and include first, second, and third iterations to analyze the data and develop themes. Table 4 provides a visual

Table 4

Code Mapping: Three Iterations of Analysis

CODE MAPPING FOR PERCEPTIONS OF INCLUSION

(Research Questions 1, 2, and 3)

RQ#1 How do elementary principals and special education teachers make sense of inclusion and inclusive practices? Themes 1A, 1B, 1C

RQ#2 How do elementary principals and special education teachers explain inclusive implementation practices in their schools? Themes 2A, 2B, 2C

RQ#3 How are espoused beliefs of elementary principals and special education teachers evident in the implementation of inclusive practices in their schools? Themes 3A, 3B, 3C

(THIRD ITERATION: APPLICATION TO DATA SET AND THEORY)

(SECOND ITERATION: PATTERN VARIABLES)

Continuum of Services	Process of Change	Perceptions and Practices
1A Continuum of Services	2A Dynamic Process	3A Implementation Strategies
1B School Wide Process	2B Implementing Best Practice	3B Evolved Process
1C Conceptualize Service Continuum	2C Need for Paradigm Shift	3C Developing School Culture

(FIRST ITERATION: INITIAL CODES/SURFACE CONTENT ANALYSIS)

1A least restrictive environment	2A support	3A addressing varying attitudes
1A student rights	2A team decisions	3A impact of resources
1A student needs	2A communication	3A variety of options
1A socialization needs	2A changing practices	3A administrator perceptions
1A appreciating differences	2A keep an open mind	
1B meeting individual academic needs	2B facilitate an inclusive environment	3B student centered teaching/ learning
1B developing school community	2B collaborative team approach	3B meeting challenges
1B data driven decisions	2B teacher empowerment	3B stakeholder support
1C nurturing inclusive attitudes	2C recognizing current status	3C positive parental support
1C positive benefits for students	2C outlining change needs	3C starting where we are
1C participation by all stakeholders	2C inconsistent progress	3C work in progress

DATA: Interviews DATA: Observations DATA: Documents

A= Mountain View B = P. T. Mackley C = Peach Mill

presentation of the code mapping procedure used in this study which follows the structure suggested by Anfara et al.

Constas (1992) explained that iterative category designations might be developed, modified, or eliminated at various points during the research process. This concept supports Maxwell's (2005) description of the qualitative research process as an interactive process moving back and forth between components rather than being a linear process. Table 5 represents the documentational table described in the work of Constas (1992) which I used to outline the category components' three procedural elements: origination, verification, and nomination. Constas indicated that these procedural elements are designed to answer three questions:

> Origination – … The associated question is, "Where does the responsibility or authority for the creation of categories reside?"…
> Verification – … The question associated with this component is, "On what grounds can one justify the creation or existence of a given set of categories?"…
> Nomination – … The question asked for this component is, "What is the source of a name used to identify a given category?" (pp. 257-260)

Temporal designations provided a chronology of category development. The purpose of the table was to identify at what point categories were identified and how they were originated, verified, and named during the research process. Wolcott (1994) suggested that researchers should make their process clear to their readers by using visuals in the form of graphs, charts, tables, and figures. By using this table, I provided clear disclosure of the processes undertaken in this study.

Table 5

Documentational Table for the Development of Categories

COMPONENT OF CATEGORIZATION	TEMPORAL DESIGNATION		
Origination	A priori	A posteriori	Iterative
Where does the authority for creating categories reside?			
-participants			
-programs			
-investigative			
-literature	CS DC DP EP	SP IP PS IS CC	
-interpretative			PS
Verification			
On what grounds can one justify a given category?			
-rational		CS SP EP	
-referential		IP DP DC	
-external			
-empirical			
-technical			
-participative		CC SP IS PS	
Nomination			
What is the source of the name used to describe a category?			
-participants		CS IP SP EP	CC
-programs			
-investigative			
-literature		CS DC CC	
-interpretative			

Category Label Key

Continuum of Services (CS)	Need for Paradigm Shift (PS)	
School Wide Process (SP)	Implementing Strategies (IS)	
Conceptualizing Service Continuum (CC)	Implementing Best Practices (IP)	
Dynamic Process (DP)	Evolved Process (EP)	Developing School Culture (DC)

Methods of Verification

In qualitative research, verification is indicative of what quantitative research refers to as validity. Seeking verification occurs in a number of ways. This study used three of these verification methods to support the robustness and integrity of this study. These verification methods included triangulation, member checking, and thick descriptions of data.

Triangulation was used in order to find evidence to support developing themes. Stake (2006) defined triangulation as "an effort to assure that the right information and interpretations have been obtained" (p. 35). Triangulation involved utilizing various data sources: two observations per principal, one interview per principal, one observation and one interview per special education teacher, documents/artifacts, and a survey. Maxwell (2005) explained that triangulation reduces the risk of introducing systematic biases into the conclusions. Similarly, the weaknesses of certain data sources are counterbalanced by using multiple data sources.

Member checking is a process in which the participants in the study read the researcher's findings and corroborate the accuracy of the written account. This process includes asking participants to comment on descriptions, themes, accuracy of inferences, and interview content (Creswell, 2005). Participants in this study had the opportunity to check the accuracy of this information. Constas (1992) labeled this the participative approach.

Thick description adds to the ability to verify the findings. Speaking of description in qualitative data, Wolcott (1994) stated, " … it is worthy of our painstakingly thorough

and adequately comprehensive efforts to try to get things right, in spite of the impossibility of ever fully succeeding" (p. 56). Wolcott believes that it is best to begin with too much rather than too little description. Field notes from observations, interviews, and all utilized data sources add to the ability to enrich the descriptive data collected at the sites. Becker (1996) corroborated Wolcott's suggestions regarding thick description. He indicated that too many details, if available, allows researchers to become aware of non-anticipated phenomenon that might influence their study.

Chapter Summary

I outlined the method used for data collection. An attempt was made to make the procedures thorough and clear so that readers can examine the integrity of the research process. The rationale for using a qualitative, multi-site, instrumental case study design was supported with the work of Johnson Onwuegbuzie (2004) and Merriman (1998). The connection between the research questions and the purpose are indicative of the appropriateness of the type of research design selected. Following the concept of quintain offered by Stake (2006) allowed the notion of within and between case analysis to be developed. Further, the flexibility, yet systematic characteristics of qualitative designs was discussed. I explained how I balanced my interview questions to maximize the collection of relevant data and discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the data sources to take into account using sources in ways that compliment each other. Finally, data analysis procedures were revealed so readers are aware of the systematic process planned. This included addressing three methods of verification employed to guarantee trustworthiness.

CHAPTER 4

A PORTRAIT OF MOUNTAIN VIEW WITH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS FROM A SINGLE SITE

Chapter Introduction

My analysis and findings are addressed in Chapter 4, Chapter 5, Chapter 6, and Chapter 7. In Chapter 4, Chapter 5, and Chapter 6 analysis and findings are developed for each of the three school sites. Consistent data collection and procedures were utilized at each site to increase the likelihood of obtaining data for cross-site analysis that are more comparable. At each single site, schools were examined independent of one another and within-site analysis were completed. Data from the single sites, using multiple data sources, allowed the development of themes that answered the three research questions relative to each individual site. In Chapter 7, a cross-site analysis took place producing ultimate answers for the three research questions.

In this chapter, I begin by providing a rich, thick description of Mountain View Elementary School. The intent of this process is to provide readers with information that paints a portrait of Mountain View Elementary School. Placing the school in context assists with clarifying data. After the portrait is painted, within-case data analysis occurs and themes are developed that answer the research questions for this single site. A final discussion of themes and findings occurs in Chapter 7 which presents a cross-site analysis from the three schools studied and addresses the research questions in light of the themes developed across sites.

School History

Mountain View Elementary School is a kindergarten through fifth grade school located in a small town in the southeastern United States. Originally, built in 1884, its name was changed to Mountain View Elementary School in 1950. In 1986, the school moved into a new $2,000,000 building. As a needed response to the growing population at the school, an additional wing was added to the school in 1994. The school is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). Mountain View Elementary has recorded a population range of 793 to 840 students from 2002 to 2008. Even after the construction of an additional large elementary school in the district in 2000, currently, Mountain View Elementary has six portable buildings that house 12 classrooms indicating the need for another facility expansion, but budget constraints might eliminate building a new addition to the school at this time.

Community Demographics

Mountain View Elementary School lies within a small town covering 5.35 miles with a population of 2,078 people. The racial and ethnic demographics indicate that the town of Mountain View is below the national percentage in every ethnic group except White for which the percentage is 17.3 percentage points higher than the national percentage. Table 6 contains the data on the town's racial and ethnic makeup. The gender profile of the town is an even balance with 1,040 males and 1,038 females. The largest number of residents falls between the age range of 25 to 44, while the age range of 45-64 represents the second largest age group living in the town.

The larger county in which Mountain View lies has a population of 47,593 residents.

Table 6

Mountain View Racial and Ethnic Demographics

Race	Number	Percentage	National Percentage
White	1,921	92.4	75.1
African American	136	6.5	12.3
American Indian/ Alaska Native	5	0.2	0.9
Asian	1	0.0	3.6
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	0	0.0	0.0
Some other race	4	0.2	5.5
Two or more race	11	0.5	2.4
Hispanic or Latino	20	1.0	12.5

The county has 24 large companies that employ 3,508 individuals. These companies manufacture goods and provide services in the area. The community has seven elementary schools with a total enrollment of 3,442 students, two middle schools with a total enrollment of 1,754, one high school with a total enrollment of 2,146. In addition, there is one private school, one technical center, and one college in the county. Further, there are two clinics, no hospital, one nursing home, two doctors, and two dentists. The town of Mountain View has 38 Protestant churches. There is one newspaper in the area that is produced bi-weekly and one radio station to provide current communication. The average per capita income is $21,742 and the average per pupil expenditure is $6,241, which is below the state and national averages.

School Demographics

The 840 students at Mountain View Elementary School are served by a faculty of 55 full-time teachers, one part-time teacher, and two full-time administrators. The principal is a White female, while her assistant is a White male. Sixty percent of the faculty members have earned Master's degrees or higher. Approximately one-half of the faculty members have between one and ten years of teaching experience with the remaining half having teaching experience at 16 years and above. The ethnic composition of the faculty reflects the demographics of the population in the county in that 99% of the faculty members are White and 1% of the faculty is of minority ethnicity.

Table 7 shows the number of classes per grade level that are available at the school. Approximately 140 students of the 840 served receive some type of special education indicating that 17% of the student population received services under IDEA 2004 during

Table 7

Mountain View Distribution of Classes

Grade Level	Number of Classes
Pre-Kindergarten	1
Kindergarten	7
Pre-First	1
First	8
Second	7
Third	6
Fourth	6
Fifth	6
Self-Contained Special Education Classes	2

the 2007-2008 school year. The special education staff serving these students includes two resource teachers, two CDC teachers, two speech/language pathologists, and six teaching assistants. Additional related services are provided by an occupational therapist and a physical therapist. In addition, English Language Learners (ELL) and students identified as gifted receive services, but were omitted from the 140 students identified under IDEA 2004. At least one student with significant medical needs was assigned to Mountain View because there is a full-time nurse serving the school in addition to the special education services available there.

Mountain View became a Title I school during the 1999-2000 school year. The 2007-2008 school profile indicated that 54.4% of the school's student population is considered economically disadvantaged. Data used to determine the school status in terms of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) indicated that only three subgroups produced data to determine AYP: economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, and White. This resulted because all other subgroup categories lacked the necessary number of members, according to NCLB regulations, for consideration. Students in the three categories under examination met the federal benchmark and the school met AYP. The school's No Child Left Behind history indicated that the school was targeted for assistance in 2003, but from 2004 until the present is considered in good standing.

Figure 5 shows the AYP data for Mountain View for 2007 and 2008 according to the allowable subgroups. The school earned A's in the areas of math, reading/language arts, social studies, and science when the academic growth was considered for the school. Mountain View recorded only six suspensions during the 2007-2008 school year.

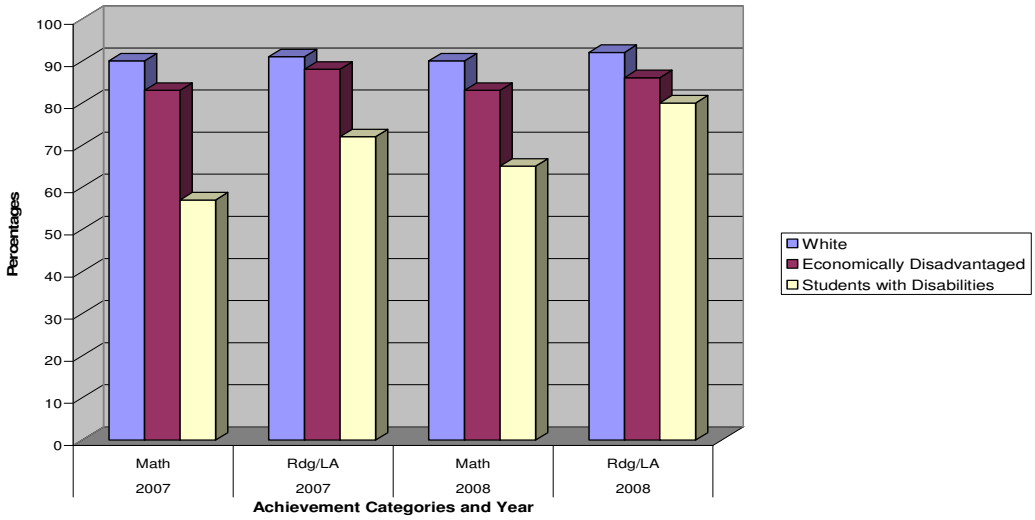

Figure 5. Mountain View adequate yearly progress for 2007 and 2008.

School Characteristics

Every school has a distinct character that is determined by examining the physical plant and the culture. Mountain View is no exception to this because these two components interact and create a persona for this school. Looking at the school characteristics sets the stage for understanding and examining themes within the specific context of this school. In this section, descriptions of the school physical plant and culture allow readers to continue and extend their understanding of Mountain View Elementary School.

Physical Plant

Mountain View is a single-level school that is located immediately off a major highway. While the school sign is visible from the highway, the school building is not. In fact, there is a drive lined with trees that leads to the school and gives it a more quiet, tranquil atmosphere. The location of the administrative complex is unusual in that the entrance to these offices is on the inside of a large multi-purpose room that serves as a cafeteria, assembly room, and an auditorium. The principal's office, reception area, teacher workroom that also serves as a lounge, the bookkeeper's office, and the back entrance to the library are in the administrative complex. The principal noted that this is inconvenient for security purposes because the entrance is not visible from the position of the main office. Consequently, there are staff members stationed at a table in the hall to greet students and attend to students who are tardy. The assistant principal's office is a single space on the opposite side of the multi-purpose room. As is common with most elementary schools, the structure is divided into wings, which are designated by grade

levels. The six portables that are necessary to accommodate the student population are located behind the building. The structure is designed such that each classroom in the main building has a door to access the outside.

Additional security procedures are in place to address school safety. The school is equipped with a security camera at the front entrance and security lighting at all building entries. Teachers and staff are required to wear identification badges. Likewise, visitors are required to wear visitor badges while on the premises. Throughout the day, the administrators and office staff use walkie-talkies for quick and convenient communication in the building. Handbooks of county and school policies are available for teachers, parents, and other stakeholders.

Culture

The first perception that assists in painting a portrait of Mountain View is that the school is student-centered. At the beginning of the day, teachers stand outside, open car doors, and provide positive verbal and non-verbal reinforcement to start each student's day on a positive note. Most teachers displayed student work on the hallway walls. Much of the work was authentic writing which the principal later explained conformed to a county-wide emphasis placed on writing. Consequently, the school had started Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to focus on writing at each grade level. The slogan "Kids are #1 at Mountain View Elementary" was seen throughout the school on bulletin boards, walls, and tee shirts worn by students and teachers. During the morning announcements, the principal provides a "word of the day." Students are encouraged to write the definition for the word and turn it in to the office. Those students engaging in

that task are acknowledged by having their names read on the intercom during school-wide announcements (Field Notes, April 29, 2008).

The school appeared orderly and students were courteous and polite. The school-wide rules are displayed on the wall in the multi-purpose room, which was the hub for the school's daily functioning. The school-wide rules are as follows:

- Follow all class and cafeteria rules.
- Follow all teacher/adult directions the first time given.
- Keep hands, feet, objects, gestures, and inappropriate comments to yourself.
- Stay in a straight quiet line in the hallways.
- Be respectful to classmates, teachers, and adults.
- Respect school property as well as the property of others.

In addition to the school-wide rules, cafeteria rules are posted as follows:

- No loud or inappropriate noise: use your normal voice.
- No throwing food or beverage or smashing food or beverage containers.
- No harassing or taking food from other students.
- Leave tables and floor clean and free of trash or food.
- Use respectful behavior toward lunchroom personnel or supervisors.
- Remain in your seat until instructed to clean your table or throw away trash.

At the rear of the multi-purpose room, the wall is decorated with the pillars associated with the Character Counts Program: Respect, Caring, Fairness, Responsibility, Trustworthiness, and Citizenship. Lunch starts promptly at 10:15 a.m. with 30 minute

lunch periods for each class. By 1:15 p.m. all classes have rotated through the cafetorium and completed their lunch break. Immediately at the end of lunch, the custodians clean the space and the aftercare staff begin to prepare the room for students involved in that program (Field Notes, April 29, 2008).

The Mountain View School Improvement Plan (2006) cited the following belief statements:

- Students learn in different ways.
- A safe and comfortable physical environment promotes student learning.
- Positive relationships and mutual respect among and between students and staff enhance a student's self-esteem.
- Students learn best while actively engaged in the learning process.
- A supportive and challenging learning environment gives students better opportunities to learn and make appropriate decisions.
- Students learn best when they have developmentally appropriate learning activities.
- Teachers, parents, and community should share the responsibility for support of students learning.
- Special needs students benefit when provided with special services and resources.
- Each student is a valued individual, having unique physical, social, emotional, and intellectual needs.

From these belief statements, the stated mission is "At Mountain View Elementary School, our mission is to provide opportunities for all students to learn, achieve, and succeed." This provided the impetus for the following vision:

> The vision of Mountain View Elementary School is to develop 21st Century citizens who are well prepared socially, emotionally, physically, intellectually, and psychologically to live confidently in a technologically advanced, multi-cultural society. In addition, Mountain View Elementary strives to recruit dedicated and competent faculty and staff who share our visions and goals for our students.

Upon my arrival at the school, the principal gave me a tour of the school and made the following statement:

> We do a pretty good job of integrating kids according to their needs. I think most educators in the building share my beliefs. My school is accepting of kids with all kinds of needs. This is a really good school to accept people in terms of whoever they are. (Principal, personal communication, April 28, 2008)

The principal stated that previously her school enrolled all of the students with disabilities with more intense needs because of the school's reputation for taking care of children. Since that time, the director of exceptional children in the district established additional self-contained classes in the county so more students stay in their zone schools. The principal shared a story about a student who enrolled at Mountain View because of the perceived quality of service in the school though there is an appropriate class in his zone. She stated that the county has an open enrollment policy so students can move from school to school as parents request such changes.

The assistant principal was a classroom teacher at Mountain View prior to his administrative assignment. During observation and conversation, it was obvious that his relationship with the faculty was more casual than the principal's. During this site visit, he maintained friendly, but appropriate interactions with the staff. Like the principal, he spends a good portion of his day interacting with students in the school. He stated that he specifically visits the resource and CDC classes to provide support for the teachers and to act as a role model for the students (Assistant Principal, personal communication, April 28, 2008).

Mountain View Elementary outlined a prioritized list of goal targets in their School Improvement Plan (2006). Four goals were outlined in the areas of mathematics; writing and language; reading and language arts; and, nonacademic behaviors. The goal outlined for nonacademic behaviors stated that emphasis would be placed on "students' taking responsibility for personal actions, respecting self and others, and understanding and appreciating the diversity of all people (p. 25)." The action steps outlined for this purpose included placing emphasis on the Character Counts Program; continuing to emphasize the fifth grade safety patrols and behavior incentive programs; and participation in community programs such as Veteran's Day and Evening of the Arts. At the time of the school visit, the school was involved in "Hat Day," which was an activity to raise money for Relay for Life.

The school community epitomized a holistic, caring environment that includes all individuals involved in the school life on a daily basis. Several observations supported this perspective. First, the cafeteria workers had morning snacks available for the bus

drivers and stated that they must take care of the bus drivers because the drivers take care of the kids. The maintenance workers inquired about one student asking if he was at school and having a good day. During the conversation, the student in question came into the multi-purpose room and hugged one of the workers acknowledging that he was happy to see her. Teaching assistants sitting in the faculty lounge during lunch engaged in conversation about how they rotate to various teachers' rooms. They described how they provide instructional support for teachers to whom they are assigned. Several staff members entered the principal's office to use her computer, phone, desk, and so forth. There appeared to be a welcoming atmosphere throughout the building. Finally, the students had the opportunity to participate in a school-wide safety program about strangers. The principal stood near the gym door where the students entered and positioned herself so that she could talk to, touch, and recognize each student as they came into the gym for the program. This principal behavior served a dual role. As she greeted the students, she also stood on the electrical cords used for the audio-visual equipment needed for the presentation to ensure that students did not trip (Field Notes, April 28, 2008).

Demographics for Research Participants

Table 8 provides demographic data regarding the special education teachers and administrators at Mountain View participating in the interviews and observations. These participants were apprised of the purpose of the study and the required activities involved. Each participant had the opportunity to decline; however, each one opted to participate. Both administrators assigned to the school agreed to participate and all of the

Table 8

Demographic Data on Mountain View Interview Participants

Participants	General Education Teaching Experience	Special Education Teaching Experience	Years in Current School	Current Teaching Position
Principal	18 yrs.	5 yrs.	6 yrs.	-
Assistant Principal	7 yrs.	0	10 yrs.	-
Teacher 1	0	24 yrs.	10 yrs.	Self-contained Class
Teacher 2	0	4 yrs.	4 yrs.	Self-contained Class
Teacher 3	0	3.5 yrs.	3.5 yrs.	Resource
Teacher 4	0	2 yrs.	2 yrs.	Resource

special education teachers assigned to the building participated. While there were additional special education support personnel in the school, the target group included individuals in a special education teaching capacity.

Major Themes

In this section, I discuss themes that were developed to address the three research questions for this study; (1) How do elementary principals and special education teachers make sense of inclusion and inclusive practices?, (2) How do elementary principals and special educations teachers explain inclusive implementation practices in their schools?, and (3) How are espoused beliefs of elementary principals and special education teachers evident in the implementation of inclusive practices in their schools? These themes, presenting a within-case analysis, answer the research questions for the single site of Mountain View Elementary School. to present a within-case analysis. The three themes discussed include continuum of services, dynamic process, and implementation strategies. An analysis of each theme separately discloses the concepts that reinforce the appropriateness of the theme development. These themes are revisited in Chapter 7 when the cross-site analysis occurs.

Continuum of Services

This theme answers the research question "How do elementary principals and special education teachers make sense of inclusion and inclusive practices?" A continuum of services indicates that there are different service delivery models available that can be placed on a continuum from the least restrictive which is the general curriculum to the

most restrictive environment which most educators consider the most restrictive to include a special day school or hospital/homebound settings. It was very clear that the principals and special education teachers described their lived experiences with inclusion as a continuum of services, which they expressed in a number of ways. Included in their descriptions were their perceptions of the how inclusion was manifested in their school culture and what the results were for implementing inclusion as they have executed it.

Least restrictive environment. The assistant principal did use the term least restrictive [environment] that is stated in special education law. It was expressed in the following manner:

> I guess I would probably define the inclusion of students with disabilities as the least restrictive with the most opportunity to be socially interacting with peers and in situations that are, non-threatening or, do not cause them too much stress. You know, some children can't handle being in a classroom with 20 others, and we have had to back down on some of our students' time in classrooms because it actually stressed them out to the point that they would cry or just could not handle the amount of time around so many other kids with so much going on.

Still others at this school shared their understanding through descriptions that did not include special education jargon, yet described the least restrictive environment offered on a continuum of services with the IEP team placing individual students on the continuum. Teacher 1 provides services for students in a self-contained setting and she described her perception based on what occurs in her classroom.

> Most of our children that are in here in self-contained come to us in the morning.

That way we're able to get roll, take them to breakfast, and we're also able to gauge potential problems, potential situations [for the day]. All of my children go with their regular age/grade peers to activities and special areas, art, music, PE. Some of them go with a special ed attendant and some of them go independently … Over half of our children (I'm resource, so the resource teacher or the resource program and the self-contained program work very close together. That is one of the places that we start sending our kids out to get them more academics and ready to go into the regular classroom. We have had children that we got during kindergarten, first grade, that by the time they were third and fourth grade they were totally mainstreamed. You know, they're totally in a regular classroom with resource assistance. It seems like the earlier we get them the better chance we have of getting those behaviors and those skills that they need to get back out. Some of our kids, especially third, fourth and fifth grade where they're taking the regular [state assessment], go into the regular classroom for science and social studies … We have any of the related services including OT, speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy. We've got vision coming here and we also have a couple that get assistive technology for communication … A typical day – whatever the kid needs to be successful that day.

Teacher 2, who has taught in a self-contained special education classroom for 4 years, expressed a more global understanding regarding inclusion. She qualified her position by

providing a rationale for how individual decisions regarding appropriate services develop.

> Well, every student is different. We take into consideration the communication needs, independent skill, and IQ as far as inclusion. The IQ is really not a [factor] for inclusion but sometimes if a student is ED [emotionally disturbed] with a higher IQ, the inclusion has to be higher for those students to meet their needs. So the program is designed for higher IQ students to be in a more academic inclusive environment, which would be science, social studies. It would consist of resource math and reading, and then my class. I teach mainly social skills, self-help skills, and strategies of how to control tension and stress. … We mainly use the model where we have CDC. We have regular education and resource. That seems to be the best model and it seems to work well. As far as the students in wheelchairs or communication problems, these students mainly go to PE, library with an assistant or myself. I take the students to art and music, and then the TA [Teaching Assistant] takes the other students for the rest of them [general education involvement], and computer lab. I have adaptive technology in the computer area for students with mobility issues

Teachers in the different programs described their understanding of inclusion in terms of their program delivery as did the teachers who work in CDC settings. Teacher 3, a resource teacher with 3.5 years of teaching experience all in special education, made the following response to an inquiry about how she defines inclusion:

> To be in the regular classroom learning with their general education peers with

assistance as needed from an assistant or the special ed teacher, but not necessarily being singled out … I try to do it to where I'm never taking just special ed students, I'm taking regular students and special ed if I'm going to do a group.

Teacher 4, a resource teacher with 2 years of teaching experience, offered an explanation that was consistent with that of Teacher 3. She stated the following:

I would define it as all students, no matter what, are included with whatever type of disabilities, included with regular ed or general ed classroom and there's no separation. They're just grouped together in every activity, everything. That's – you know, they're included in everything, and they're not pushed aside. It's [inclusion process] just involved. Everyone's involved, both teachers: special ed, regular ed. The whole group or team works together to see that each child's needs are met, that they are not pulled from anything.

The principal presented more of a historical perspective and reflected on past and present practices in her special education teaching experience and her school as well. She expressed her perspective in the following manner:

One time inclusion just simply meant they went to special areas with their grade level or their appropriate peers or whatever, and we do still do that especially with our CDC kids because that's some of it. That's all they can handle. Some of those children in that class go to a math class or a reading class in the regular classroom. They may or may not have an assistant or teacher go with them. Then there are children just all over the building who don't have any, necessarily, assistant or teacher, but they're in there for whatever class is. So we

just really have a hodgepodge. I have at some times had a special ed teacher in the classroom working collaboratively with the regular ed teacher. Our numbers are keeping us from doing that anymore, so that would be one meaning of inclusion, but you know, the other would be going to PE with a class. That could also be inclusion. I just want them to be in their appropriate age grade as much as possible.

In expressing their understandings and perceptions about inclusion, the participants at Mountain View Elementary expressed the values that they held that reinforced their opinions. The principal shared the philosophy that she held as the school leader.

I want to make sure that my children, whoever they might be, whether they're special education or not, are having all of the opportunities and are meeting their potential, which can be difficult if you get picked in a certain way [focus on their disabilities]. I don't like that. We want our kids in a regular curriculum, regular classroom as much as we possibly can. So that's one of the things that I try to do. How often can we get these kids out regardless of what kinds of special needs they have?

It appeared that the special education teachers embraced the principal's attitude because the teachers referenced her philosophy when they talked about the school and community climate. In addition to the school's belief statement embracing an inclusive philosophy, Teacher 2 made the following observation about the principal's stance:

Inclusion in this school comes from the top down, and if a teacher did not believe in inclusion in this school, they wouldn't work here long. That's how strong the principal has been on inclusion. It comes from the top down.

Teacher 1 summarized the program at Mountain View Elementary in a manner that reflected the perspective of the special education teachers in the school.

> Resource works with us extremely well. The regular classroom teachers, all the related services, it's just an integral [part]. It's not a separate program. Special ed is no more separate from Mountain View Elementary School than kindergarten is separate or first grade is separate. It is an integral part of the program. They're [students with disabilities] accepted. It's nice.

Student rights. The special education teachers and principals of Mountain View Elementary School expressed the belief that students with disabilities have a right to access the general curriculum and all supporting activities available at the school. They expressed this in various ways. The principal expressed this in her interview. She was very clear when asked how she responded to negative parent communication regarding students with disabilities participating in the general curriculum. She stated the following:

> Everybody has the right to be in that classroom, and they [students with disabilities] have just as much right to be in there. If there're some problems that we can help iron out, maybe the teacher hasn't noticed something or if there's something we can do, then we'll do that. You know, usually it's not just a blanket like that. There are particular things that they're looking at, and so we can work around that. This is an extremely accepting community and school environment. They're just all our kids, and that's just how it is, you know.

As the participants at Mountain View sought to make sense of inclusion and inclusive practices, they expressed the thought that the continuum of services was necessary to

address the rights of students to have access to the general education curriculum. These educators perceived student rights as pivotal to providing a continuum of services to meet all students' needs appropriately. The assistant principal looked at the idea of student rights from both sides of the issue: general education students and special education students. His perspective included a whole school perspective yet he spoke of considering what was best for kids. He shared the following perspective:

> Sometimes they [students with disabilities] don't know space or social acceptabilities and they'll touch inappropriately. I just tell them [parents] that their child is no different than that child, and we all have a right to an education here at this school. It goes from special ed, non-special ed to Christian and atheist and a lot of differences in beliefs, but, the main concern here, and I tell them, is that our first priority is for the child … I'd like to put that special ed child in a room full-time, but if I just can feel comfortable with an attendant for an hour then if that's what's in the best interest of that child, that's what I'll do. Sometimes we do run into situations where a parent of a special ed child wants full inclusion in the classroom and it's not in the child's best interest or in the classes' or school's best interest, and I have to think about the good of all.

Teacher 2 explained her thought on student rights in terms of what she believes is the way to interpret least restrictive environment. She asserted the following:

> A student with a disability should have the right to an inclusive education to the

extent that it does not infringe upon the right of another student to learn and does not have a negative effect on the special needs student. Some inclusion, I mean if it has a negative effect on a special needs student that's the most restrictive environment for that child, so I would have to see if it's a negative or a positive, and if it's a negative, then I would look at trying to help to change that.

Meeting individual needs. When examining the continuum of services regarding the special education model at Mountain View Elementary School, the staff expressed many notions regarding how meeting students' individual needs was key in the decisions regarding where students would fall on the continuum they provide. These needs were addressed in the areas of emotional needs and academic needs. The school staff contemplates the impact their decisions have on both of these categories of student needs.

The principal provided information regarding a specific situation in which the needs of a student with Downs Syndrome were integral in making plans for her over a three-year period.

When she first came to our school and was in kindergarten, and she did repeat kindergarten, she stayed in kindergarten two years, we had a real concern about her running off, and so we had an attendant that went with her to recess every day. We had that in place because that was a parent's concern. That's not in place anymore. She has outgrown the need for that, so we've pulled that back. I would say that as far as having an instructor or assistant from special ed in her classroom, they may do that

some of the time and then some of the time is pull-out. But the special ed hours, I– I think, would still be less than half even if you included assistant time.

Teacher 2 expressed her considerations when problems exist regarding what her students might need to be successful.

> If a student is having problems with the inclusion part of the program, I pull the student back in for three weeks to a month to determine, you know, depends on the student. I will work with that student and help him/her learn a strategy just to deal with the situation that he/she is having problems with, and then we'll try it again. Then, I monitor the student closely.

The staff at Mountain View expressed the idea that they make sense out of inclusion and inclusive practices by considering how providing a continuum of services can meet students' social and emotional needs. Teacher 4 spoke of the emotional component and how confidence and motivation impacted students' successes in inclusive settings. She shared her observation regarding a group of students with disabilities that she served for reading. Her approach to meeting their academic needs changed as she sensed changes in the emotional support they needed. This change caused her to move up the continuum to a service model that was not as restrictive as what was provided previously.

> Last year I pulled them out for reading for an hour. Now they're in the classroom, which I pull them out for thirty minutes this year. I don't pull them out for the hour, and we just reread what they've read in the classroom with the group and we will focus on comprehension and what's on their IEP. This year I can see confidence and

because they were out here last year and they were reading to me, and we would just read and do everything. Now they're in the classroom, and they're able to do that and they're confident and they're not scared or afraid that they're going to miss anything. They'll just answer it and if they miss it they're fine. It's just nice to go in and see them participating and knowing that they can do it.

Another observation came from the assistant principal who expressed support for student emotional needs by suggesting that sometimes the least restrictive environment on the service continuum positively impacts the emotional growth of students:

We've noticed that kids feel less at risk if that resource teacher comes in and she's helping not just the resource student, not just the special ed student, but she's helping everyone, so they don't see it as their special help. They may be in a group of themselves and two others and she's pinpointing her assistant source then but there are others involved in the process, and they seem to feel more at ease in that situation.

The principals and special education teachers found it important to appreciate differences in their school as a reflection of the differences in the community and the larger society. Several individuals spoke about recognizing, accepting, and respecting differences in students. They thought these experiences allow everyone in the environment to grow in the area of social skills and citizenship.

The principal explained her philosophy that she uses when she articulates an inclusive philosophy in her daily decision making processes. She stated the following:

I think that it's an asset to have children with all different levels of ability together. I think that we all learn tolerance, caring, empathy for each other and realize that we all have strengths and weaknesses. Again, I say that over and over but it's true. For my weaknesses, I turn to people I work with, people I'm in class with to help me, and with my strengths I help them, and I think that that makes us better people all around. I think that my kids are better people because we are accepted and tolerant of each other regardless of where we fall in whatever spectrum. So that's pretty much it. That's how we drive this school.

She also stated the following:

All groups learn, all populations. If you don't have high expectations and can't see good role models, then you're not moving in the right direction. You've got to have kids who can read on grade level reading with you. You also learn a great deal from kids who struggle. You can learn such great lessons from them. We're all different and that's wonderful. You know, I preach that to them too, you're all different and have different strengths and weaknesses, and isn't it great that we can all be here and share that. So I think there are times when it's not the appropriate thing and I still struggle sometimes with that. There are times that it's not the appropriate thing but most of the time we need to be just a diverse group working together and helping each other out. It sounds so silly but that's really what I believe.

Teacher 4 added a significant statement to support what the principal expressed. When talking about how she would respond to a parent with negative impressions of inclusion, Teacher 4 found that appreciating differences is a major benefit for both students with and without disabilities. She stated:

> I would just disagree with them that it doesn't affect their child. It actually probably would help because then they're more aware of the different needs of others and I would just let them know that not everyone is the same and they don't learn the same and most people should understand that. I know there's a few out there that do think that it would affect their child, but I think that it puts a lot out there and other kids can learn from watching other kids. So maybe her child or that person's child could learn something from one of the disabled children and then vice-versa; the disabled child could learn something from her child. So if you pull them out and they're not around their classmates that are the same age and they can't pick up and learn from anyone if they're not around or exposed to non-disabled students.

Socialization needs. Socialization was viewed as a valuable result of the school's use of the continuum of services. While it is close to the concept of appreciating differences, the staff made a distinction between the two that were related to defining socialization as developing age appropriate social skills to assist students with disabilities in becoming proficient in those areas that are important for all students to acquire.

The assistant principal spoke of the socialization aspect of inclusive practices. He provided a positive outcome based on peer modeling. His perspective speaks to what the special education staff as a whole shared when they were interviewed:

> We're lucky that our special ed population is not a behavior issue. We have a couple but for the most part it is shyness or they're afraid to be wrong sometimes. That's one thing that has helped out in the classroom is they feel more comfortable. They're around their peers whom they're always around and they tend to ask more questions and speak out more in that classroom. So because the person sitting around them is talking out, getting a positive response from the teacher, they want that positive response too. Plus, they get cues from some of the kids that are more apt to answer correctly. They will get cues from them … We have great success in the fact that for the most part our kids are very helpful to our special ed population. I like that aspect of the inclusion process of everyone helping each other.

Teacher 1 shared her perspective of what the long-term effect of developing socialization skills has meant for students with disabilities that she has taught. However, she expressed equal benefits for students without disabilities. She stated the following:

> We have a fifth grade teacher here who brings her classroom into ours weekly. The bond between her children and my kids is amazing. Children that started doing this have now gone on to be special ed teachers. It makes a difference when they get into the middle school and the high school situation and they see the kids in the hall. They

see interaction with other … They'll stand up for them [students with disabilities]. They're forming a friendship, a relationship that carries. It's something that they're allowed to interact. They do something every week. They're involved with each other an individual interacting basis. The kids in her room plan things to do and my kids adore them and look forward to it so much. They have their parents give my kids Christmas parties and end of school parties and things where the parents become involved because the kids go home and talk about it. The greatest benefit here has been to the regular classroom kids.

Appreciating differences. The staff at Mountain View suggested that an inclusion philosophy drives the school to accept differences and see the value that each student brings to the school. As a result of this belief that is strongly articulated by the principal, they made sense out inclusive practice as providing a continuum of services that starts with general education and moves to self-contained settings. They utilize the team approach to determine where students can be most successful on the continuum. This includes providing all supports available and necessary for student success. They believe that the continuum is supported by their philosophy that all students have a human and legal right to participate in the general curriculum. They indicated that the positive outcomes of providing the continuum include assisting students with disabilities to develop socialization skills and to display more mature emotional development.

Dynamic Process

The second theme that was developed responds to the second research question "How do elementary principals and special education teachers explain inclusive implementation practices in their schools?" A dynamic process suggests that the program is not static, but changes within the parameters of what is available and needed by the student population. Further, a dynamic process indicates that changes are moving toward program improvement.

Being open to change. The inclusion practices described by the principals and special education staff at Mountain Elementary School are a vibrant process. Decisions made for the school community are subject to ongoing examination and change. The staff described how inclusive practices are implemented while considering student-centered circumstances that potentially causes changes to how implementation is carried out for a specific student. Changes in programming from simple adjustments to major program changes are possible throughout the academic year. When the special education teachers spoke about changing practices, they were very specific about changes that they made to improve services to students. Teacher 2 indicated that she is flexible regarding changing what she is doing if the IEP team disagrees with a programming plan that she is implementing or recommending for a student.

> Well, I step back, re-evaluate the situation, and I try to provide two choices if I have a strong disagreement. I'll try to take the road down the middle, so to speak, or I have asked the team to let me try something … and then report back. I'm not real dogmatic. It has to be this way or that way because I don't really know what

will work until the students starts doing that. I'd say down the middle.

Teacher 3 spoke of changes that are implemented that reflect parental uneasiness or disagreement about programming recommendations. She noted the flexible approach that she takes while concurrently making sure that she is clear with the possible ramifications of some decisions.

> We usually try to make the parent happy but also let the parent know we want to do what is best for the child. Usually, we're trying to do what we think is best for the child anyway so we try to let the parent know how this might affect the child down the road. A lot of times the parent does have the final say so. If it is not a major, major issue we will say, "Okay, if you do not want this much time can we try this much time?" So we'll cut back time. We'll try. We want to reach an agreement. A lot of times if there's a disagreement, it's over how many hours the student is out of the regular education classroom, especially if we have a student who needs to have some time in a self-contained classroom, which we have some that work in and out. Most of the time it's over the hours and what they might be missing in the classroom. I've tried to rearrange my schedule so they don't miss reading time or direct instruction time that they can get. If it's something they're not going to get at all in the classroom, that they just can't comprehend at the level it's being taught, I try to explain that to the parents so they understand I'm trying to help their child, and it's not going to get across to their child in the class at that time.

Team decisions. One pertinent factor in a dynamic process related to change is how decisions are made that influence the program holistically. The six participants spoke of decisions being team decisions. The participants stated that they abide by team decisions. They tended not to provide specific strategies that they use to try to influence team decisions.

The principal did commit to what she does to get the team to accept her recommendations though she uses knowledge of students to support her opinions.

> Well, I'm a member of the team, I mean, so we each try to listen and compromise and sometimes we do have to compromise. I think that sometimes because I am able to back up and see a bigger picture and maybe have tracked this child for four years or five years, have a relationship with the parents, which is incredibly important, I don't want to say they defer often to me, but I think that usually we're all in agreement, usually. If I'm the person out, the odd man out, whatever, I still go along with the team decision but try to give them the information that I might have that might sway them to see why I feel the way I do.

Teacher 2 provided a straightforward response to the team process involved in making programming decisions that summarized what all special education teachers in this school who were interviewed expressed. She made the following observation:

> As a team member, I help facilitate individual education programs that fit the needs of each student within the classroom. I have certain models that I prefer to use with certain students, and I share that with the parents and the team, and the team decides

which model would suit their student.

Support for students and teachers. Support developed as a perception in the dynamic process described by these respondents. Support was described from two standpoints: supports for students and supports for teachers. The staff expressed the belief that appropriate staff to support students and teachers was necessary to make program improvements that maximize inclusive practice. A part of teacher support included teacher training regarding differentiated instruction and characteristics of students with disabilities. Both administrators spoke about the challenge that working in an inclusive setting can produce. However, both of the administrators at Mountain View were cognizant of what was required to support the teachers.

The principal explained as follows:

> I think it's hard for a teacher to meet all the different needs. I think that's difficult so that's a real challenge to help teachers be able to do that better. I think that there are times such as the little boy with emotional problems I talked about earlier. Sometimes those kinds of things can escalate to where it's a safety issue. You want to make sure your lowest and your highest and everybody in the middle are getting everything that they need and that is huge. That's a huge job. So I think that's a challenge.

The assistant principal indicated the following:

> You know, the sad thing is that we do have teachers that do not respond well to

students with special needs. We're trying to change that. We have provided in-service training on a lot of various disabilities: Autism, Downs Syndrome, and just, common learning disabilities. We're trying to help teachers. Not everyone is the same. Even with regular ed students not everyone is the same. This child's just labeled and you don't put so much on that label. You know, they can still learn. They can still be taught in the classroom. But some teachers need more support. We try to always include the teacher in the IEP meeting for, you know, the child. If we're looking to place a second grade student into this teacher's third grade classroom then at the end of that second grade year we'll try to bring in that third grade teacher so they can have that moment to meet the parent and start it off and hear what can be expected the next year to prepare them. So that's one step that we take to prepare teachers. Honestly, there are certain teachers [whose rooms] I don't put special needs students in because I just don't feel that they'll meet their needs.

The special education teachers' discussions tended to provide a dual perspective regarding support in that they described teacher and student support as an integrated concept. Their discussions explored how their experiences in an effort to support the teachers produced the result of making the educational experiences for the children more productive and positive. Likewise, supporting the students, teachers were given support that made them more proficient in delivering quality instruction to a diverse group of students. Teacher 1 made this dual support concept clear in her avowal.

With our children when we have an inclusion situation with a child, we usually begin

with one of the special ed staff going into the regular classroom with them and assessing the degree of independence the child is going to be able to demonstrate in that situation. Then we provide for the regular classroom teacher materials or assistance that they may need. There's always an understanding that if the child becomes disruptive to the regular classroom that the child will be removed because we want the children to develop appropriate social skills and appropriate interaction skills. So if there is a situation we deal with it immediately because that's when my children are most susceptible to knowing what's going on. So we provide backup and assistance for any materials or behavioral issues that come up.

Teacher 1 also indicated that she would ask the general education teacher to interact with students in a non-structured setting such as the playground prior to the student going into the general education classroom. She believed that this presented the opportunity for the general education teacher and the student to become comfortable with each other. She pointed out, just as the assistant principal did, that sometimes teachers and students have fear that need to be supported.

Teacher 2 alluded to what she perceived as expressions of concern or fear of the unknown. She indicated that changing teacher attitudes can occur by addressing the areas about which they feel less knowledgeable. After creating a greater skill base, then a larger group of teachers that are comfortable addressing differences can evolve. This helps

improve inclusive practices employed in the school environment. She had the following statement to add to the discussion regarding support:

> Well, I try to engage them in a conversation, and I listen to their fears. I don't want to say fears so I'll say concerns. It has been my experience that a lot of teachers who are overly concerned have not worked with special needs kids or the teacher has and had a bad experience with maybe not enough support from the special education department. So I would just listen and just try to work with the teacher … hopefully, some of the doubts would be diminished as it went on.

Teacher 3 stated:

> As I can, I provide support in the classroom. I will tell them [general education teachers] different ways that they might be able to modify for that child. I have a couple of inclusion classes so I go in and, at times, I will pull students aside who do not have the IEP but just needs the extra help. I will work with them one-on-one, or I will pull them into a group of three or four and work with them. So I just try to mainly, give ideas of how to reach them the best way.

Communication to facilitate changing practices. Communication is an important part of the dynamic process involved in implementing inclusion at Mountain View Elementary School. Communication among the administrators and teachers helps the staff to address negative impacts and celebrate positive influences. Communication facilitates program changes needed for program enhancement. The special education teachers and administrators stated that several reasons make open communication necessary in implementing their special education program. The assistant principal

provided one such reason. He stated that there was a need to express confidence in the ability of the general education teachers to address the needs of students with disabilities. Another reason was so that general education teachers and special education teachers would feel comfortable sharing ideas and observations about strategies that improve instruction for specific students. Positive communication with students and parents was the highest observed inclusive behavior noted during the observations at Mountain View Elementary School.

Teacher 3 described how she begins the year by engaging in dialogue about specific students with general education teachers. She made the following statement:

> At the beginning of the year, I will print out information about the student with their IEP, the modifications and accommodations, and I will go around and discuss with the teachers the needs that those students have and things that they can do in the classroom that would help those kids. I also have teachers that will come to me when they are having problems and ask or if they have questions about how to do something or what to do. I will try to help them with that or get them the information that they need that would help.

The assistant principal indicated that improving communication has been a focused effort for the school staff because it supports the success of inclusive practices. He offered the following insight:

> One thing that we have been working on is talking to teachers and telling the teachers to go to the special ed teacher if she comes in the room for inclusion and asking for ideas in order to open up that chain of communication between them so that they can

do what is best for the kid and be on the same page. Sometimes it can be an inclusion classroom and still function like a pull-out program if the two [teachers] are not working together.

The special education teachers and administrators at Mountain View Elementary School indicated that they believe that the implementation of inclusive practices in their school is a dynamic process because they make changes as student and school needs indicate. They suggested that changes occurring in their programs are facilitated by team decisions, appropriate support for students and teachers, and communication. They use the team process to communicate among the team members to outline positive, student-centered changes that are needed.

Implementation Strategies

Implementing strategies is the final theme that developed based on the data collected at Mountain View Elementary School which answers the research question "How are espoused beliefs of elementary principals and special education teachers evident in the implementation of inclusive practices in their schools?" By implementing strategies, participants referred to implementing those approaches that support putting inclusive practices in place and addressing obstacles to implementation. These participants described how they implement effective strategies to continue to refine their process.

Addressing varying attitudes. The special education teachers and principals noted that they must address varying attitudes when they consider what will make their program successful. Specifically, they must design strategies that address attitudes regarding inclusive practices held by various stakeholders in their school. These attitudes

were discussed from the perspectives of parental attitudes and general education teacher attitudes and building level administrator as evidenced on the Principal and Inclusion Survey. The school staff expressed a desire to establish an attitude of trust between the school and parents. The principal pointed out that many of the students cannot express themselves verbally so parents have to believe that the school is the student's strongest advocate. The assistant principal spoke of meeting the needs of the students and the parents' expectations which becomes a difficult task when expectations do not match either the school staff's expectations or the students' abilities.

The special education teachers tended to focus on the attitudes of general education teachers. They explained the strategies that they implemented to address these attitudes. Teacher 1 pointed out the attitudes about inclusive practices in the school are a mixture of positive and negative outlooks. She tended to perceive a relationship between the levels of support provided for special education students with these attitudes: the more support the more positive the attitude of the general education teacher. Teacher 1 stated that the special education teachers have a preferred set of general education teachers that seek out their students to make sure they are included in daily activities and usually promote positive peer relations in nonacademic activities. Teacher 3 stated that some teachers are purposely not selected to work with special education students because efforts to change their attitudes have proven futile. A consistent practice was expressed by resource teachers and CDC teachers regarding selectivity. The principal spoke of this issue, as well, when she was explaining how resources are allocated within the building.

The two principals responded to the Principal and Inclusion Survey (see Appendix E) and their responses reflected the opinions they shared in their interviews. On the survey, the principal indicated a supportive attitude regarding inclusive practices for all statements on Section III that assesses attitudes toward inclusion using a Likert Scale. She believed it was important for her to clarify that decisions should be based on what is appropriate for each child and she wrote this clarification on the survey though the survey format did not provide for such explanations. On Section IV regarding most appropriate placement, she indicated that the most appropriate placement was regular classroom instruction for most or all of the day for all disability categories except mental retardation. For the category of mental retardation, she indicated that the most appropriate placement was a special education classroom for most or all of the school day.

The assistant principal expressed stronger statements of disagreement and agreement in support of inclusive practices than did the principal on the section of the survey that measures attitude. On statements to which the principal responded agree in Section III, the assistant principal indicated strongly agree. Likewise, when the principal responded disagree, the assistant principal responded strongly disagree. However, like the principal, he indicated that placement in regular education with support for most or all of the day was appropriate for all disability areas except students with mental retardation. In this instance, he indicated that he perceived a special education classroom for most or all of the day as the most appropriate placement.

Impact of resources. Resources have an impact on inclusive practices at Mountain View Elementary School. Another implementation strategy was how to utilize teachers,

teaching assistant, and other support staff to efficiently allocate assistance for students and teachers. Some human resources are controlled by the district while the strategic use of resources within the building is under the control of the principal. The principal explained how she attempts to impact the success of the inclusive experiences in academic experiences. She provided the following insight:

> I have several teachers and I have strategically placed them in all grade levels so that I have two or three teachers in each grade level that work better with kids who need different instruction. Their classrooms are the ones that I go to if the child needs to be placed just in a regular classroom that's where I'm looking, or if they need pull-out into a regular classroom for a special area or a special activity. So I guess that I have kind of built that up in the programming that I have people who are better at differentiating instruction in each grade level so that I have placement for all of my kids.

Another insight of the principal provided a different view of what could be the catalyst for teacher reluctance: lack of confidence in knowledge and skills. She explained strategies she utilized to address this reluctance. Her strategy is a proactive stance to address this possible cause. She described her actions as providing academic resources for her teaching staff. She stated:

> I think it's common, that we all doubt ourselves. We want to do the very best. We have a professional library that we continue to build, and there are a lot of books, pamphlets, whatever, about different kinds of disabilities that we have available. We

sit down and talk about it. We sit down and talk with the teacher that they had last year and see kind of what worked for them and what didn't work. Talking to the parent is invaluable because they know them [the student] so well. So we pull on resources. And I think that we are good to say I want to do what's best and I'm not sure what that is. Let's talk about it. That's not a sign of weakness, it's a sign of, I think, being pretty strong.

One constraint that the special education teachers expressed was that they have had to implement some program options to a quality level that is less than what they would desire because of the number of special education teachers provided to their school by the district. The special education teachers remarked that they could do more with some changes in structure. Teacher 3 explained her dilemma as follows:

I think in order for inclusion to work the way it's truly meant to be you need to have at least one special ed teacher per grade level, and then they could work their way through each classroom or spend a longer time in that classroom. Then the need to pull a student out would not be –You really wouldn't need to pull a student out as often. You could do a lot that way and you could team teach more. I have three grade levels so it's almost impossible to do inclusion the way we really need to do it.

Teacher 4 gave a clear example of the effect of human resources on program implementation and why strategies related to this concern are vital at Mountain View Elementary School. She stated the following:

At the beginning of this school year I started doing some inclusion classes with my

fourth and fifth grade teachers. I have so many teachers and so many kids it's hard to do the inclusion because they're kind of spread out and there's not a true inclusion classroom where there's several of them in there. I have to do all pullout now. I stopped after Christmas, so in January, I began doing all pullout because there's just no way. I have forty kids on my caseload, and there are eighteen teachers and they're spread out. There are six teachers for each grade level, and I serve third, fourth and fifth.

Variety of options. The Mountain View School staff described the variety of options that they have placed in their school structure so that they can reach each individual's students' needs with the resources available to them. The school tries to balance student needs, resources, and stakeholder interests to provide special education support and general education support for the students. The assistant principal described in detail what inclusive practice at the school entails. He expressed the following insights:

Well, the thing is we don't want a label on kids, and we want all kids to be accepted. The thing is I have CDC which is the most restrictive classroom we have here, and I have CDC students that are in a regular ed classroom all day long and with no attendant, and I have CDC students who don't leave that room but we send people to them. I have one on a feeding tube. He can't go to PE. He has trouble in classrooms, but he likes interaction, so we've teamed him up with partners, fifth grade buddies, to come to him and read stories to him. I think to be included in this school, is whether it's regular ed or special ed or whatever, we're here to help out others and model

> good experiences and good relationships and sharing with others. We just really push to help others out. It doesn't always work. It's not always successful. Some kids slip and slide and make bad choices. Some kids get pulled back from some of their freedoms, but we want every child to have the benefit of the doubt and have the opportunity to be here and learn and have the full experience of lunch with their peers and talk. I don't like a quiet cafeteria. I like interaction between kids. We want kid to be involved in the whole learning process.

Teacher 3 spoke of the various ways she attempts to serve students from the perspective of her role as a resource teacher. Her initiative to keep students in general education settings and go into their rooms instead of pulling them out has benefits that she explained as working in the classroom as much as possible so that students will not feel singled out. Instead, they will continue to feel a part of their grade level peer group. She expressed the idea that these students are being exposed to the general curriculum with just a little extra help which is also provided to students that are non-disabled in that classroom. However, she acknowledged that sometimes students need additional help that goes beyond what can be provided by going into the classroom. For these students, pullout is necessary in the current school structure.

The special education teachers and administrators at Mountain View Elementary School identified three main areas where strategies were implemented strategies to support inclusive practice in their school. They made efforts to identify and recruit the support of those teachers in their building already possessing adequate knowledge and skills to comfortably teach students with varying needs. At the same time, they tried to

educate those lacking in knowledge and skills to widen their pool of supportive teachers and impact differing attitudes. From the perspective of resources, they recognized that getting additional teaching positions was limited by what the district allocated. While delineating what the optimal situation would require, they figured out ways of using the resources available. This is impacted by the increasing the number of general education teachers willing and able to work successfully with students with disabilities. The special education teachers and administrators implemented strategies to identify and use a variety of options that expose students with disabilities to as many rich academic and non-academic experiences as possible.

Table 9 shows a combined table of the behaviors exhibited by the six teacher and two administrator participants. These observations occurred in IEP meetings, special education and general education classrooms, a Response to Intervention team meeting, a parent conference, and administrator shadowing. The table was re-arranged in ascending order to establish a median percentage score and to examine the data for intra-observational trends. The organization of the data allows the establishment of low, medium, and high incidences of observed inclusive behaviors exhibited the administrators and special education teachers at this school site.

During structured observations, those behaviors seen in the actions of principals and special education teachers that are necessary for establishing and sustaining inclusive practice were observed at the highest percentages of incidences calculated from the 90-minute observation sessions in the areas of participating in IEP meetings, collaborating

Table 9

Mountain View Structured Observation Results for All Participants

Behaviors	Percentages of Time for 90-Minute Observations Sessions
Facilitates inclusive planning	0
Expresses inclusive vision	6
Verbalizes commitment to include students with disabilities	6
Successes celebrated	11
Communicates directly with special education staff	17
Participates in team planning	22
Facilitate provisions for resources	28
Encouraging academic success	28
Observes classroom activities	33
Evaluates the physical plant	39
Knowledge of differentiated curriculum	39
Verbalizes knowledge of students' strengths	56
Collaboration with students	61
Positive interaction with students	67
Supports necessary accommodations	67
Positive interaction with staff	72
Communication with parents	78
Collaboration with staff	78
Participates in IEP meetings	89

with staff, communication with parents, and positive interaction with staff. Inclusive behaviors observed at medium percentages were in the areas of observes classroom activities, evaluates the physical plant, and knowledge of differentiated curriculum. The lowest incidences of inclusive behaviors taken from the observation instrument list for administrators and special education teachers were observed in the facilitates inclusive planning, expresses inclusive vision, and verbalizes commitment to include students with disabilities.

The data for this school indicated that the participants did not act upon their reported pledge to their inclusive vision by communicating it on a daily basis. Though the participants commented about the principal's commitment, they failed to proactive with verbalizing their own commitment regularly. This might be a critical area to enhance the pace of the process and the commitment of needed human and financial resources from the district.

Chapter Summary

Mountain View Elementary School is a small elementary school that serves students in kindergarten through fifth grade. The school's belief statements include a conviction directed toward making opportunities and supports available to students with disabilities. Within the School Improvement Plan (2006), the staff supported this belief by providing evidence of initiatives to support inclusive practice. The special education teachers suggested that there is a genuine inclusive effort that is fostered through the leadership of the principal. Many stakeholders alluded to the principal's commitment demonstrated

through expressive communication and proactive behaviors that set the stage for placing students successfully in the least restrictive environment.

Three themes developed for Mountain View Elementary School. First, participants sensed that inclusive practices were represented by utilizing a continuum of services on which the service models available move from the general education classroom which is the least restrictive environment to the most restrictive placement which is a special day school. Between those two polar opposites are varying degrees of participation in the general education curriculum. These participants expressed that the philosophy that students had a human right to acceptance in the school community and access to the general education curriculum which was the catalyst for their practices. Second, participants described the inclusive implementation in their school as a dynamic process because it changes based on the needs of the students and is impacted by team decisions, available support for staff and students, and open communication. The third theme indicated that espoused beliefs are played out by implementing strategies which include influencing varying attitudes regarding inclusion and inclusive practices. However, their observed behaviors demonstrated a level of absence of communicating their commitment within the context of the daily work environment. Attention is also given to using available resources to put beliefs into practice and identifying and utilizing a variety of options to make sure that students are receiving appropriate opportunities so that they can experience academic and non-academic success.

CHAPTER 5

A PORTRAIT OF P. T. MACKLEY WITH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS FROM A SINGLE SITE

Chapter Introduction

In this chapter, I provide a rich, thick description of P. T. Mackley Elementary by painting a portrait of the school using history and the daily observed routines and practices. In the first part of this chapter, my goal is to impart enough information to my readers so they can perceive the character of the school. Presenting information regarding the community, faculty, and parents assists with this goal as well. Further, I continue by explaining the school culture and traditions to enhance the characterization. After presenting the thick description, I discuss the themes developed that answer the three research questions. These themes are explained using all available data sources collected for this study.

School History

P. T. Mackley Elementary School has a rich history of rapid growth from its inception to the present. P. T. Mackley Elementary School opened in 1974 under a different name. The school is located in a suburban area near a metropolitan city in the southeastern United States. Upon opening, the school enrolled 400 students which was 100 students above the anticipated 300 with a $664,524.00 fourteen-classroom building. Due to the growth in the area, a 12-room addition was affixed as early as the end of the first academic year. By 1976, it became necessary to add additional classrooms. Converting the library and the secretary's office into classrooms was the means by which this

occurred. The population growth in the area continued requiring the school to implement a divided schedule (i.e. two time schedules used to accommodate K-2nd and 3rd -5th groups) for students during the third year and to bus students to a neighboring school. In 1978, an additional $475,950.00 structure enhanced the school. This was the last construction for a 10-year period at which time space was added for a Comprehensive Development Classroom (CDC) at a cost of $217,000.00. Initially, the students came from five overcrowded schools in the immediate area. This along with the influx of new residents accounted for the rapid growth in the school population. Currently, 625 students in grades kindergarten through fifth attend the school. P. T. Mackley received its current name in 1988 when the county decided to rename the school to honor an individual who had served as an educator in the district in a number of positions for almost a half century.

Community Demographic

P. T. Mackley Elementary School is located in a community with a population of 37,845 residents. According to the 2006 census report, the gender breakdown of the community is 51.2% female and 48.8% male. Table 10 presents the racial/ethnic breakdown for the area of the county. The majority ethnic group in the community is White. The remaining ethnic representations fall significantly below the majority race. The census reported no individuals of Hispanic origin residing in the immediate community though the school demographics recorded in the School Improvement Plan

Table 10

Mackley Community Racial and Ethnic Demographics

Race	Number	Percentage	Compared to National Percentage
White	34,590	91.4%	75.1
African American	1,513	4.0%	12.3
American Indian/ Alaska Native	76	0.2%	0.9
Asian	1,060	2.8%	3.6
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	38	0.1%	0.0
Some other race	189	0.5%	5.5
Two or more races	378	1.0%	2.4
Hispanic or Latino	0	0	12.5

(2007) note that there are parents of Hispanic origin with children enrolled in P. T. Mackley. The discrepancy in this information might be due to the difference between the dates of the census report and the school information though the difference is only one year. Another explanation might be that these families did not participate in the census process, but were counted because of the enrollment of their children in school.

A description of the community by the economic, business, and residential structure embellishes an understanding of the school environment. The average income in the school community is $60,128. In the immediate area, there are new subdivisions and apartment complexes, small businesses many of which are fast food restaurants, gas stations, three banks, one large grocery store, and one hardware store. While the workforce consists of skilled employees in the immediate area, professionals in the areas of law, medicine, and education commute into the metropolitan area to work. The greater area of the county in which the school resides has 7,164 school age students.
In 2007, the per pupil expenditure was $8,190. This represents an increase of $1,987 per pupil between 2005 and 2007.

The school benefits from a number of businesses in the immediate area that provide support in various ways. This ranges from monetary donations to purchasing computers, and from incentives/rewards to structural improvements made on the school parking lot and drive. One graphics business provided signs for various events, decals, paint, and etched glass decoration depicting the school mascot. Individuals in the business

community provide mentoring and educational experiences for the students regarding developing an awareness of business economics.

School Demographics

The 625 member student population at P. T. Mackley consists of 289 female students and 336 male students. The student population mirrors the ethnic composition of the immediate area. There is a significantly larger number of students who are White than other ethnic groups. Table 11 shows the ethnic structure of the student population of the school. According to school records, all students are English proficient. Additionally, 31.10% of the students qualified for free and reduced lunch rates.

The P. T. Mackley Elementary faculty and staff consist of 61 individuals inclusive of the two administrators. Twenty-nine faculty members have advanced degrees that represents 73% of the teaching staff. All of the teaching staff at the school are highly qualified and certified in the areas of their teaching responsibilities. The racial/ethnic composition of the staff is 98.4% White and 1.6% African-American, with no other race represented. There are 58 female faculty/staff members, which represents 95% while there are three males representing 4.9%. Both administrators are White females. Twenty-one members of the teaching staff have 20 or more years of teaching experience.

Table 12 shows the distribution of the classes and the number of students per grade level. The table indicates there is a balance in the number of students enrolled in each grade level with the exception of the self-contained Comprehensive Development Class (CDC). The range of students per grade level, omitting the students in CDC, is 101-112. One hundred twenty-nine students enrolled at P. T. Mackley Elementary during the 2007-

Table 11

Ethnic Structure of Mackley

Ethnicity	Number of Students
White	599
African American	13
American Indian	2
Hispanic	5
Asian	6
Pacific Islander	0

Table 12

Mackley Distribution of Classes

Grade Level	Number of Classes	Number of Students per Class
Kindergarten	6	102
First Grade	5	107
Second Grade	5	102
Third Grade	5	101
Fourth	5	101
Fifth	5	112
Self-Contained CDC	1	8

2008 school year were identified under IDEA 2004 as students with disabilities representing 21% of the student population. Two resource inclusion teachers, two resource inclusion interns, and one CDC teacher serve these students. In addition, a speech/language pathologist, school psychologist, and three assistants provide services. The services of occupational therapists and physical therapists are available for students with these needs.

While the school offers a continuum of services, there is a great emphasis on serving students in inclusive settings. P. T. Mackley Elementary started developing a focus on inclusion over 10 years ago and the program has grown though there is still one self-contained classroom and some students involved in pullout (i.e., students go to a resource classroom and receive instruction from a special education teacher in small groups) though it is labeled intervention.

Characterized as a suburban school on the fringe of a large metropolitan city and deemed a safe school, P. T. Mackley Elementary is in good standing according to NCLB standards. The school has maintained this status since 2003 through the 2007 reporting year. Since the population of the school consists of predominately White students, the subgroups examined for NCLB status were White, economically disadvantaged, and students with disabilities. All three groups met federal benchmarks in the areas of reading/language arts/writing and mathematics. The School Improvement Plan (2007) noted that P. T. Mackley Elementary has a number of strengths based on state testing data. A list of these strengths includes:

- Maintained A average on state writing assessment for the past 3 years. The score

above the state score of 4.1 for the same year.

- The 3% of students scoring below proficient on the state math assessment in 2007 was well below the state target of 10%.
- The 3% of students scoring below proficient on state reading/language assessments in 2007 was well below the state target of 10%.
- In 2006 and 2007, the school received all A's on the Criterion Referenced Academic Achievement Report Card.
- Equity was evident in male and female performance in reading and mathematics.
- As a school, P. T. Mackley students scored 72% advanced in mathematics and 63% advanced in reading and language arts on the state assessment. This indicated growth in both subjects. Mathematics showed a gain of 11% and reading showed a gain of 3%.

Figure 6 shows the NCLB data for P. T. Mackley Elementary School for two consecutive years: 2007 and 2008. These data provided the impetus to derive the noted strengths listed in the School Improvement Plan (2007). Though the school received A's in academic achievement in all academic areas in 2007 and 2008, the scores obtained for academic growth were not as impressive or consistent. In 2007, the school obtained an F in mathematics, C in reading/language arts, B in social studies, and A in science. Likewise, the scores for 2008 were an C in mathematics, B in reading/language arts, A in social studies, and A in science. Consequently, the school determined that a target focus for the next reporting period was to move more students from the proficient to the

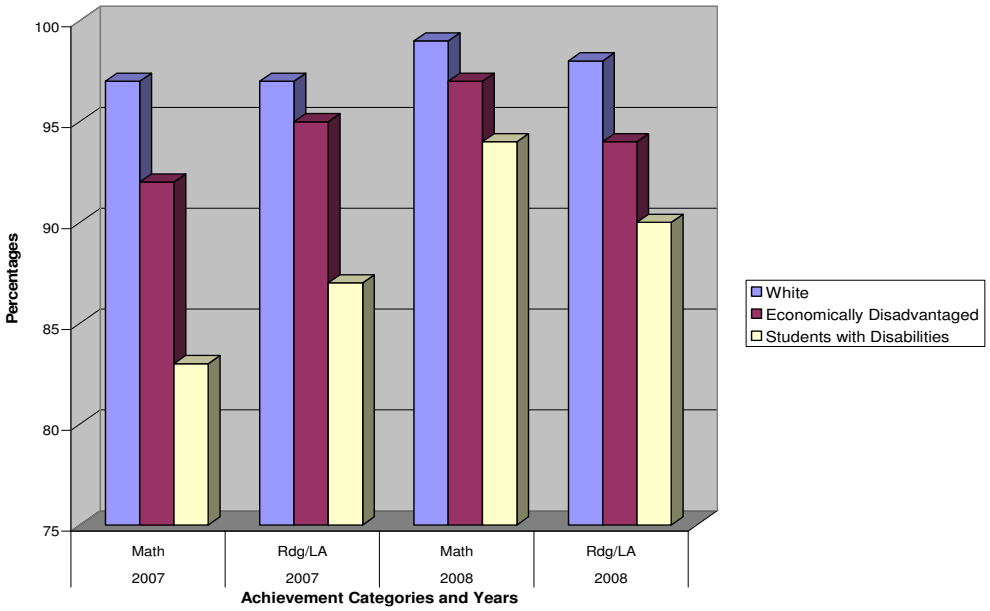

Figure 6. P. T. Mackley adequate yearly progress for 2007 and 2008.

advanced level in mathematics. The school decided to focus on increases in academic growth in reading/language arts, and writing as well. Further, the 2008 data supported greater academic increases in the areas targeted for growth. for the next reporting period was to move more students from the proficient to the

advanced level in mathematics. The school decided to focus on increases in academic growth in reading/language arts, and writing as well. Further, the 2008 data supported greater academic increases in the areas targeted for growth.

The school staff outlined specific targeted goals for their improvement focus. They outlined three goals in their School Improvement Plan (2007) that were stated in the following manner:

- Goal 1 is to increase student reading/language arts criterion referenced scores by 5% at the Advanced level on the state assessment each year.
- Goal 2 is to increase by 5% the number of students achieving Advanced levels and decrease the percentage scoring Below Proficient by 10% on the annual 5th grade State Writing Assessment.
- Goal 3 is to increase student math criterion referenced scores by 5% at the Proficient level to the Advanced level on the state assessment each year.

School Characteristics

P. T. Mackley has distinct characteristics that set it apart from others elementary schools. Describing the physical plant and how things transpire on a daily basis at the school helps to develop a comprehensive understanding of the school. Built in 1974, the

school's 34-year history afforded time for the physical plant to change and the traditions to become ingrained in the school community. These factors assisted with establishing a comprehensive understanding of the school.

School Plant

P. T. Mackley is a one story brick structure built on 50 acres of land covering 54,865 square feet of space with adequate space and amenities to serve the current student population. The school sits between the local middle school and a private apartment complex. The space holds 35 classrooms, a cafetorium, kitchen, office complex, and a media center. Two portable buildings house a music class, literacy lab, and daycare office. Faculty and visitor parking lots are located in the front and rear of the school. The school resides approximately three-tenths of a mile from the main highway that goes through the town. As individuals approach the school, rows of benches lining the walkway that goes to the front door come into view, producing a welcoming atmosphere. It became obvious at the end of the day that these benches provide parents, grandparents, and siblings places to sit as they wait for the close of the school day to pick up students upon dismissal (Field Notes, May 4, 2008).

Upon entering the facility, the sense of identity is established immediately. Etched with the mascot, a mustang, the front doors lead straight ahead to the entrance to the library, which has a large welcome sign on the wall while the administrative complex is on the right. Like many schools, the school is separated into grade level wings. On the right wall outside of the library, a parent information center is readily available with literature regarding school events, school practices, and school system information. A

large cabinet near the hall that holds a variety of reward stickers emphasizes the positive environment of the school as well. An award given by the state department of education adorns the entry of the school. This award recognized the school for outstanding efforts to provide inclusion for students with disabilities in the general education curriculum (Field Notes, May 5, 2008).

Culture

The means by which the school emphasizes character traits are interwoven throughout the school in a variety of ways. Each grade level wing represents an imaginary city with a name synonymous with a positive character trait; the principals' hall has the city name "Giving" with street names of Judicious and Discerning Boulevards. Each classroom has a street name and address such as Fairness Road, Consideration Road, Courage Road, Courtesy Street, and Compassion Road. The street name for the CDC classroom is Fun Alley. Along with these names, the thought for the day presented during morning announcements relates to these character values as well. One thought was "There is no wrong time to do right things." The principal explained that she prefers to emphasize character traits rather than give the kids lists of "do" and "don't" rules. For this reason, there are no posted rules in the school or classrooms. On another day, the assistant principal announced the thought for the day as "Standup for what is right even if you stand alone" (Field Notes, May 5, 2008).

The P. T. Mackley Elementary staff listed the following beliefs in their School Improvement Plan (2007):

- Students are the highest propriety. They can learn and achieve at high levels with learning experiences based upon assessed and identified needs.
- High expectations are important for all students to learn, succeed and achieve to the best of their ability.
- All students are valued as people and learners and have a right to learn in a secure, stimulating, child-centered environment that fosters lifelong learning.
- A variety of research-based instructional strategies must be utilized to provide positive, challenging learning experiences for all students.
- Multiple assessment data sources must be used to evaluate student performance and guide and modify instruction to ensure student success achieving the school goals.
- To develop productive citizens appropriate character education must be provided to support positive relationships and interactions.
- All staff and stakeholders must be committed to their involvement in collaboration developing the child physically, intellectually, socially, and emotionally.
- The faculty and community must work as a team to make shared decisions and align local, state, and federal policies and procedures that support goals for student learning. (p. 29)

The school staff reported the mission and vision that they have established based on their stated beliefs. Their stated mission proclaims, “The mission of P. T. Mackley

Elementary School is to provide a learning culture that fosters the personal growth, creativity, and academic excellence of each student while mastering the state standards in a child-centered atmosphere" (School Improvement Plan, 2007, p. 30). The vision is "P. T. Mackley students will achieve academic excellence while developing into productive citizens" (School Improvement Plan, 2007, p. 30).

During an informal conversation, the principal stated that the school has a long history of inclusive practice. In fact, an inclusion intern program at the school resulted from the sustained inclusive practices. However, the principal explained that the inclusion program had a "rough" start with teachers preferring pullout programs and asking to opt out of having students with disabilities served in their classrooms. However, upon realizing that opting out was not possible, the program continued and developed over time. Each intern is a certified special education teacher who will be assigned to an urban school to start an inclusion program in a school where no such program exists. The funding sources for these three positions are from general education, special education, and Title 1 (P1-PTME, Field Notes, May 4, 2008) .

Being a Professional Development II school is another unique component of P. T. Mackley. Collaboration with a nearby university provides significant professional growth for cooperating teachers and the university student teachers. Along with county activities, this professional relationship makes numerous professional growth activities available for staff and student teachers. The principal indicated that the relationship with the university allows the school access to well-trained teachers when they must fill faculty vacancies.

As a part of the school improvement process, P. T. Mackley's staff analyzed their parent, student, and teacher surveys to determine the attitudes of these three groups of stakeholders. Through this activity, the staff noted that parents consider the school a safe and nurturing environment that encourages their participation. Further, parents indicated that teachers use a variety of learning activities and teaching strategies, and teachers have high expectations for student learning. The area of greatest agreement by students was that teachers have high expectations of them and communicate what students need to achieve those expectations. Teachers felt that they use a variety of strategies and activities to help students learn. Further, teachers believed that they have a wide range of resources available to them to support and enhance student learning (School Improvement Plan, 2007).

The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) at Mackley appears to be a strong organization involved in many aspects of the school. Among their contributions to the school are funding additional staff positions in the school for enrichment purposes. This includes funding for a school clinic assistant, a full time math activity teacher, computer teacher, and librarian assistant. Further, the PTA sponsors a volunteer program of dependable parents who assist with projects, tutor students, visit classrooms to share their career experiences, and support learning in other ways.

Demographics for Research Participants

Table 13 provides demographic information regarding the individuals who participated in this research study. After receiving information regarding the study, these individuals were asked to participate in the study. All of the special education teachers

Table 13

Demographic Data on P. T. Mackley Interview Participants

Participants	General Education Teaching Experience	Special Education Teaching Experience	Years in Current School	Current Teaching Position
Principal	12 yrs.	0	11 yrs.	-
Assistant Principal	0	14 yrs.	4 yrs.	-
Teacher 1	0	6 yrs.	1 yr.	Inclusion Intern
Teacher 2	0	1 yr.	1 yr.	Inclusion Intern
Teacher 3	3 yrs.	25 yrs.	11 yrs.	Resource
Teacher 4	0	5 yrs.	1 yr.	Resource
Teacher 5	10 yrs.	3 yrs.	1 yr.	Self-contained Class

and the building level administrators volunteered to participate. This inquiry did not include support personnel, but it included the maximum participants desired for the study from each site. As stated in the outlined method for the study, each participate participated in a prescribed number of observations and interviews. Participants with the longest tenure at the school were the principal and the resource teacher who serves as the special education department chairperson at the school. They brought perspectives that were easily contrasted with participants with shorter tenures at P. T. Mackley Elementary.

Major Themes

In this section, I present an analysis of the data taken from the available data sources. In addition, I develop themes that answer the research questions posed for this study. These answers represent the perspective of the single site that is the focus of this chapter. This within-case analysis relies on the data sources to triangulate the information and establish the trustworthiness of the data.

After conducting a surface-level, content analysis based on the data sources collected at P. T. Mackley Elementary School, several themes were developed based on the patterns detected during data examination. The school is a suburban school that has an established routine of implementing inclusive practices that spans 11 to 12 years. The themes that developed were school-wide process, implementing best practice, and evolved process. These three themes answer the research questions for this single site and will received further attention in the cross-site analysis in Chapter 7.

School-Wide Process

The participants described their inclusive environment as a school-wide process that involved every student not just students with disability labels under IDEA 2004. This theme answers research question 1, "How do elementary principals and special education teachers make sense of inclusion and inclusive practices?" These participants explained that while they must address the needs of students with disabilities, they incorporate that process in the general education setting to the maximum extent possible. In essence, they apply the notion of a continuum of services for every student in the school whether they are students with disabilities or not. According to the participants, they address this by several means.

Meeting individual academic needs. The school staff has worked diligently to make sure they are meeting individual academic needs. The principal stated the following:

> Well, I think the special ed testing is only there to help us know how to better deal with a child's learning disability when we're not finding the strategies. We're not finding how to help that child, so [we use] any testing, any way that we can find more information that can help us teach that child. I don't see special education as just because a child is certified that we treat them differently or teach them differently. Good teaching strategies are what we want to use with every child. Just because a child is certified doesn't mean that they're having needs at that moment. We may have found a way and they are just getting some support and working at grade level

and doing fine. There may be other children who are not certified that are struggling. So we really just want to address every child's need at the time they're having needs with the support. So it can be real high achieving students who are not making the gains they should be making … I just see our inclusive program for every classroom, every student, and for every teacher because teachers need support, too. They don't know every strategy … I kind of hate it when we separate special ed children from general ed students. There's just different times for all because I could be out for two weeks with an illness, and I need some extra support to get me back to where I need to be. So I just think we've just got to look at every child in every classroom and support children with any needs that they may have, not just because they're certified special ed.

At the same time the P. T. Mackley participants promoted inclusive practices, they acknowledged that they have difficulties fully including students that are low functioning. Several of the participants acknowledged that some students have needs for which the least restrictive environment is not full academic participation in the general education curriculum. They shared their thoughts on this perceived difficulty.

Teacher 1 has six years of special education teaching experience. She was an inclusion intern at P. T. Mackley during the 2007-2008 school year. She responded with the following statement:

I think there are some kids who still benefit from more – or small group attention,

and I'm not convinced that the best way to succeed with every student is through inclusion or the self-contained. I feel some kids need that middle ground because they're too high functioning to be in the self-contained class, but in their regular class I can see some that feel unsuccessful and feel lost and would benefit from more time. I just think inclusion doesn't work with all kids. I think it can work with a lot [of students], but I don't think it works with all.

While she is a licensed teacher, Teacher 2 is also an inclusion intern in the inclusion training program. She explained her philosophy regarding students' needs and inclusive programs as well. Having only one year of teaching experience, her notions support the concept that the needs of individual students remain the pivotal points for making programming decisions regarding inclusion. She provided her perspective in the following manner:

There are exceptions to every rule, and I think that's where sometimes some people forget that. There are those kids that need that one-on-one. That's the only way they can learn. There are those kids that may be ED [emotionally disturbed], never coded ED [identified under IDEA 2004] but have those tendencies. Things have happened in their lives that no one's ever recognized. Maybe they're that shy, quiet student in the back that the only way to reach them is to do a little pull-out class so they can have that confidence because they're not going to say anything in front of anybody else. I think we still need those extra programs. I think you kind have to look at the population of your school and decide. This is a model school, but this year they got two exceptions to their rule. Hmm, what do you do with those kids? Well, they still

have to go here. So I think that would be the disadvantage to full inclusion is that you can go full inclusion but you're still going to leave at least one child behind, if not more.

Teacher 3 is a veteran teacher with 25 years of special education teaching experience. Because she has worked at P. T. Mackley for 25 years, Teacher 3 maintains a rich historical perspective of the school environment. She shared this perspective by making the following observation:

> They [students] are a part of a class or they're part of everything. They do everything. Inclusion is all-inclusive. They're involved– inclusion. They're in a class.
>
> It's been successful with kids up to a year and a half grade level below, but when you get into more severe, more than two years below a grade level, it's really hard. Three years below grade placement or functioning level three years below is very, very hard. But one to two years you can do it, but it's hard work. If the child has a positive experience, success breeds success. They are included. They can see they can do it, and it's just a positive outcome down the road. I think with inclusion everybody's involved in everything: an equal part of the class.

Teacher 2 described an example of how she provided specific support for one student to explain how individual student needs are considered.

> It always depends on the students, and it, also depends a lot on the regular ed teacher and how willing they are to actually work with these students. A couple of examples this year. I have one that I work with in the fourth grade who is reading

> at about a first grade level … I worked with the teacher on modifying his curriculum so that he is still exposed to the fourth grade curriculum, but it's modified down to his level. I work closely with another teacher modifying tests for a specific student, helping with hands-on, bringing the hands-on and the visual aids into the classroom to give the kids another way of looking at things. I've tried to bring in some technology for the students that need the extra technology, even if it's not assistive technology from this district. It really just depends. If I'm not sure what to do for that child then I'm always willing to ask and learn and find out myself. I just take it child by child, teacher by teacher.

Developing the community attitude. The special education teachers and administrators at P. T. Mackley Elementary described how their school-wide process included developing inclusive attitudes that extended in the school community beyond the building level over the 11 to 12 year range. The principal explained seeing how inclusive practice moves beyond the school day into social activities away from the school is a notable occurrence for her. She spoke of this scenario as follows:

> We've just had so many stories. One story is when one of our students with very severe disabilities or a child that may in another setting not see themselves as just one of the children was invited to a birthday party or the "spend the night" party. All we've got to do is help parents figure out how to deal with a wheelchair or other disability. To see those children totally and completely included, not just academically but especially socially, warms your heart. So especially of our severely

disabled children, we really see that as our diversity, and we want all of our children to understand how much alike we all are as opposed to different. Having every child included in a classroom which is their classroom family whether they're there all day or part of the day is important. That class is who they have lunch with and they play at recess with, and they go to related arts with and participate at whatever their level is in the academics in that classroom and they're in the programs together. I think our children are very caring children. The principal added the following comment as well:

It [inclusion] means you're part of the whole school culture. I don't want anyone to feel that they're different or left out. You know, we're all just unique and special. So I think being included means you are being cared for. You feel nurtured.

You feel a part of everything. Your day is just as structured. The same expectations are there just like we would in our home with our children being different.

The principal provided more insight regarding what is involved in building a school community. She continued with the following information:

All children can be served in inclusion. Every child in the school can get help when they need help. They can receive support, encouragement, whatever it is that is needed they can receive that at any time. What I find is the most difficult part about a resource program is it really goes against the grain from everything that we try to do to help children who have special problems in education. You can have the classroom teacher working just as hard as she can in the classroom, then the child goes down the

hall and a resource teacher is working just as hard as she can but because the two have not planned together then instead of getting support on the concept that's being taught in the classroom they're getting taught something totally different. So that child who's already having difficulties now they're getting their academic day broken up. They're missing some thing that's going on in the classroom. They've got to go back and try to catch up. It's disjointed as to the concepts that are needed. So with the inclusion that help knows the exact vocabulary that's needing to be taught prior to content. They know the content where these children need some background information so they've got something to build on as the classroom teacher starts presenting it. So that planning that you know when you're in that classroom, that planning is making the difference that that child is now getting the scaffolding and support that they need for the classroom content. We find because of that that the children are successful in the general ed classroom, not just in the resource room. They're now successful all day we don't have behavior problems. We have children who are engaged in the learning. They don't look different. It changes how they perceive themselves and how they see themselves as learners. So I think this is why we never worry about our gains as far as state assessments. Our students with disabilities always make tremendous gains, but it's because they're getting that support for the general ed curriculum, not something different down the hall.

Data-driven decisions. The school-wide process described at Mackley is facilitated, as well, by making data-driven decisions. The assistant principal pointed out how the

school's NCLB standing is good and has been for several years. She pointed out that, in her opinion, the exposure of the students with disabilities to the general education curriculum has influenced the students' achievement scores at the school. The assistant principal shared her perspective in the following manner:

> The key is just making sure that these children are part of the general ed curriculum and not being pulled out. They miss too much general ed information, and they don't have the general knowledge that they need when they just have been drilled and killed with skills worksheets in a pull out program. So we want them to be in the regular program and we've seen success. I mean with test scores we've seen that those kids are doing as well or better than some of the ones that are not eligible for special ed services.

Teacher 3 described how data are used to make decision about specific program needs to place students on a continuum of services. She made the following comment:

> We are starting RTI, response to intervention, and we look at the student needs, and our school – the spectrum of service is CDC self-contained or inclusion. Now, depending on where the student is we have RTI levels, tier one, two and three. Everybody in this school (in literacy) gets tier one and two. If they have a greater need I will usually work with the principal or assistant principal to come up with a program or a time, more so a time during the day for that child and determine what type of program they need. If it's in literacy, it could be a literacy lab to work

on Fundations or Wilson for basic skills. Whether they have a few deficits and they need a computer technology program that will work or they need more individualized help with small groups, we look at the student needs, where the student is and their potential incapability and where they need to go and place the student that way.

Teacher 3 shared how she uses data and documentation to support her decisions when parents or team members question her recommendations regarding programming. She stated that having data to support her recommendations provide objective evidence necessary to convince parents and staff to be flexible and willing to try her suggestions. She noted that showing results assists with demonstrating that something is working and proving that something needs to be changed because it is not working.

Implementing Best Practice

The second theme that developed based on the data collection at P. T. Mackley was the concept of implementing best practices in the school. This theme answered the research question "How do elementary principals and special educations teachers explain inclusive implementation practices in their schools?" The participants indicated that best practices included those teaching behaviors that facilitate an inclusive climate, implement a collaborative team approach, and empower teachers to participate effectively in an inclusive environment.

Facilitating an inclusive environment. The principal, assistant principal, and special education teachers spoke of the school climate as important from a global viewpoint relative to promoting an inclusive school environment. Both administrators took

responsibility for guiding their stakeholders to inclusive thinking and actions. The assistant principal provided insight into how they structure this process.

The assistant principal saw facilitating an inclusive environment in the school as a major part of her role as one of the building administrators. She noted that scheduling special education students into inclusion classes and deciding which teachers would lead these classes are two important activities that foster an inclusive climate in the school. She pointed out that their jobs, as administrators, include making sure the apprentice program is maximized through thoughtful placement of these teachers into subjects and classrooms. The assistant principal thought that the perspective that students with disabilities are taught the same curriculum as students without disabilities is the feature that makes their environment the most inclusive. In the assistant principal's opinion, providing extra help to students with disabilities (which might include previewing materials prior to the classroom presentation) was one successful means of supporting students with special needs.

Teacher 1 explained how responding to parents of general education students is a means by which an inclusive environment is facilitated. She offered the following thoughts:

> I would just respond [to a doubtful parent] that every child can learn, and every child has the right to learn, and if there's a child with a disability in the same classroom as their child I don't feel like that takes anything necessarily away from that, the regular ed student because any modifications or accommodations that are made for the special ed student aren't going to apply anyway. They'll be learning the same

curriculum, and one person's not going to hold up another person just like her child wouldn't infringe upon a student labeled special ed at all. It's not going to make him become more far behind or anything.

Teacher 2 explained her perception of a true inclusion program which she thinks is implemented reasonably well in this school setting. She stated the following:

I believe if we teacher children, especially in the elementary schools, how to accept children that look different, act different, and sound different we're creating a better world because the older they get they won't be quite so judgmental. If a true inclusion program is set in place, a lot of times you don't even know which ones are your special ed kids. You know, I could work with a group of five kids and only one of them is special ed. I think it's all about how the classroom is set up, how the regular ed teacher handles it. If it's handled there and looked at as no big deal, I don't think it's going to be a big deal to the children or to the parents. So I think it starts there.

Collaborative team approach. The P. T. Mackley school participants, who took part in the interview, explained that they implemented a collaborative team. A collaborative team approach was perceived as a number of stakeholders working together and using all team members' expertise to make decisions that were in the best interest of the school's academic process for educating the students. Collaboration was perceived as starting at the top with the administration. The principal explained that her job is to make sure that scheduling allows for adequate time for team planning and whatever the staff needs to implement inclusive practices. She stated that planning between the special education and general education teacher is essential in the process so they can make sure that everybody

is involved in helping every student. These stakeholders conduct collaborative planning so that they are able to ensure that scaffolding is in place in their instructional delivery. The principal explained her insight by stating the following:

> I see my role as the instructional leader here at P. T. Mackley, and fortunately I have a lot of excellent staff to make that possible. We meet as the special ed team, as grade level teams about all children, so I would say I'm involved in some way in all the decision-making. That would include the academic scheduling. We the most important part of our role is to be able to make the time available for whatever we need and make sure that we have adequate planning time between special ed teachers and the general ed teacher so that everybody's involved in helping each student. They're also helping with the lesson planning and making sure that the scaffolding is in place. So I would say when we're talking about the planning it's about all students, whether they're special ed or any child in this school. We're all involved in those plans.

Teacher 1 stated that collaboration is helpful when making programming decisions in IEP team meetings. She believes that there is more collaboration between the special education teachers regarding students with disabilities; however, she stated that she does collaborate with general education teachers in the inclusion classes. Her perception was that collaboration ensures that all stakeholders come to consensus and IEP team meetings are conducted in a meaningful, but efficient manner.

Teacher 3 provided a response that characterized or summarized the perspectives of the special education teachers though Teacher 1 seemed to indicate that there was more

collaboration among special education teachers than with general education teachers. As the special education department chairperson, Teacher 3 discussed collaboration from a broader base. She stated the following:

> We do a lot of collaborating, a lot of collaborating. We have grade level meetings every week, and a lot of times they will call me into the grade level meeting. We have just one-on-one or with parent conferences and try to collaborate and work together and come up with some strategies for that child. Also, if they think the child needs a certain program, we'll look and see if we think the program will be available. When we say placement, we mean placement in special help programs within the school, not a special class placement, that type of thing, mainly through collaboration. If it's a teacher I'm working with co-planning, for certain kids, we ability group the kids, or we look at placements for them, but we usually use collaboration for classroom instruction.

Teacher 4 is a resource with 5 years of special education experience and with 1 year of service at P. T. Mackley Elementary. She indicated that she works with general education teachers to plan appropriate instruction for individual students. She noted that during the year they continue to assess the effectiveness of their initial plan. If the plan does not appear to produce student progress then further collaboration occurs to address possible deficits in their plans. Teacher 4 indicated that sometimes she and the participating general education teacher devise assessments together to determine program

effectiveness and where they have “fallen short.” She explained how collaboration has enhanced both educators in inclusive settings.

> I've been fortunate enough that these teachers that I've been placed with know that they're teaching an inclusion classroom, so they know that's going to be part of their class. If they know I'm there to help them I think that helps a lot and the nervousness isn't there. So I think that helps support them a lot. I know I've learned a lot from them and vice-versa. So I think that's been a big step to helping the child and not having the child.

Teacher empowerment. Teacher empowerment was deemed another factor important to implementing best practices needed to produce appropriate inclusive practices. Teacher empowerment referred to providing teachers with knowledge, skills, and opportunities to lead in implementing appropriate inclusive initiatives in the school. The principal focused on empowering the special education teachers to be prepared as school leaders. She wanted them to be adequately equipped to provide support for general education teachers.

She stated the following:

> I see our special ed teachers at Mackley Elementary as leaders in our school. I make sure that they get all training that we can possibly give them. Again, not just about special ed, but more about just good teaching strategies, ways of having positive reinforcement, but helping students be successful. So in that way our special ed teachers are called on by all staff members for suggestions, help, and for new

teaching strategies. All the different things that they glean from our trainings then they bring back and present to our general ed teachers. Now, of course, the ideal's when we can all be in trainings together. It's ideal if we can have a grade level with a special ed teacher. When we can only have a small number, I always choose our special ed teachers because they can bring back information and give it to the teachers, but also they can model it in a number of different classrooms that they are in everyday. So they're just our good pollinators of good information.

Teacher 2 expressed the sense of empowerment when she explained how she is involved with the students on her caseload. She described how being sought out by the general education teachers for suggestions and strategies on how to work with certain students helped her define her role as an important one in designing programs for students with challenging issues. Teacher 2 believes that her empowerment came from administrators, general education teachers, and parents and it was fostered through the collaboration that transpires daily in the Mackley school environment.

The assistant principal focused on the empowerment of general education teachers. She indicated that they had been empowered by having an extra thirty minutes of literacy acceleration time to compliment their guided reading during which time an extra adult was present to help enhance their reading instruction. This was scheduled to occur without regard to whether or not the classroom was considered an inclusion classroom. Initial apprehension transformed into positive, supportive general education teachers once they were given instruction about how to plan and implement the program. She specified the following:

> They were thrilled because they saw what that extra set of hands could do, and they saw how those children were truly just making more and faster progress than they thought possible. They were able to reach those goals that they didn't think they were going to be able to reach … It was the same curriculum, same objectives but a double dose for those children, and they loved it. But then again there have been times when you have children that in a regular classroom fifth grade level working on a second grade level and those teachers initially didn't see the benefits of inclusion. "It was this child doesn't belong here. This child needs to be in the CDC classroom or this child needs to be in a self-contained classroom somewhere." More times than not, by the end of the year, the teachers that have had those feelings about the children that were so far behind were able to see the benefit and see, socially, that those children had friends like everybody else. They would not have had those friends in a self-contained room. But those children made progress academically and probably more progress than the regular ed peers because they gained more than a year's growth when it came to state assessments. So they saw the big difference.

Evolved Process

The participants at P. T. Mackley Elementary described their status with inclusion and inclusive practices as an evolved process because it is the result of a focused process that has sustained for 11 to 12 years. This concept of evolved process answers the third research question "How are espoused beliefs of elementary principals and special education teachers evident in the implementation of inclusive practices in their schools?"

They described this evolution in terms of student- centered teaching and learning, how they have met challenges, what they do to engender support from their stakeholders and administrator perceptions.

Student-centered teaching and learning. Many examples indicate that student-centered teaching and learning is an active process, which drives instructional decisions. Having been a general education teacher for 10 years and a special education for 3 years, Teacher 5 brought a broad perspective to her position as a special education in a self-contained classroom. She discussed making student-centered instructional decisions as a means of giving validation to the use of inclusive practices. She referred to using these decisions when doubts are expressed about successful implementation. She described her actions as follows:

> I've just heard general comments like it doesn't work or it's unrealistic, or we're not prepared for this. I respond by just trying to make it work and finding different ways of doing things than they've tried before. I offer suggestions of a different activity for the children to do as they come in or different ways to work out the accommodations like with the peer partners. I just make suggestions like that. I suggest different things to try that maybe they haven't implemented before.

Additionally, making student-centered decisions regarding teaching and learning is used as a process between the general education teacher and special education teacher to get the maximum result from the students involved. This educational strategy was described as a part of the communication process between the two teachers. This process

was based on observation of student performance in the specific classroom. Teacher 4 described how this two-way communication developed.

> Well, this specific teacher has been teaching a very long time. She's very knowledgeable and very experienced, and I respect her because I've learned a lot specifically from her this year. If we have different things that she wants to work on with this group and sees that it's just too much for them and I express that to her – I mean I'm thinking that but I may not say that and she can actually see for herself. Then we'll talk about it, and we'll go back and say let's change this. Let's go back to this basic situation … So working that out is good. Some things have been good.

Teacher 4 described another example of student-centered teaching and learning which resulted in changing instruction intensity for an individual student. She reported that the instructional change produced a positive impact on the student's performance which created a situation that made it possible to change the team's original recommendation for the student's forthcoming academic year. She stated that the result was positive for the student and for the parents who were distraught when the initial recommendation of retention was suggested. She made the following statement regarding this situation:

> We have one student who, in January, we had a meeting with the parent to let them know that we were considering holding their child back the next year. Of course, they were very upset and we explained to them that we still have this much [instructional objectives to meet]. We've got this time where we can work together and get the child where he needs to be. We just had a meeting yesterday after school and told her [the mother] the good news. We expressed how I couldn't even get the student to talk to

me and now he's like the star reader in my group.

Teacher 2 explained how student-centered teaching and learning serves as an empowering experience for individual teachers. She stated that it is beneficial to be able to go to colleagues when she does not believe that she is reaching a student and ask for suggestions of different strategies to try. She posited that when she does not see students' gains, it helps to get input from what instructional observations general education teachers can make about student behavior when she is not present in the classroom. This information is utilized to change instructional strategies to get improved student progress.

Meeting challenges. The P. T. Mackley participants found that they have a history of meeting the challenges that have occurred because of making sure that their school environment is inclusive. While Mackley has focused on inclusive practices a long time, they still have the challenge of dealing with general education teachers who have doubt about teaching students with disabilities in their classrooms. Teacher 1 stated that she has not met with resistance this year, but knows that some of her colleagues have.

Teacher 1 explained her perspective of the challenges of efforts to implement inclusive practices from a broader viewpoint. She made the following observation:

I think inclusion – I mean it's definitely a challenge, and I think almost more so if you're going to be an inclusion teacher just working with eight teachers as I do. When going from even one second grade class to another, there are differences in what they're doing. Then, of course, the differences in personalities exist. There is always the challenge of making the best use of me in the class to benefit the special

ed kids, but really everybody. I don't know. I just thought of that. I think it can be and has been a success here. I mean not, of course, without its faults, but I think they do a pretty good job.

Teacher 2 spoke of "stepping up to the plate" to advocate for students. She stated that there are times that it becomes necessary to place yourself in an awkward situation if you are trying to get everyone on the same page about a student issue. However, challenges are worth the effort when students' needs are the first priority. She stated that she places this within the context of collaboration, but someone has to take the initiative when students' programs need modifications. She explained that decisions are not intended to make teachers feel better or bring personal attention. While these are good by-products, the primary attention is advocacy for what is right for students. She explained the following perspective:

Because this is my first year, at first, I was very intimidated to say anything, not sure how people would accept my opinion, but then realized that my job is not to worry about what the adults think and do what's best for that student. I always try to bring in an administrator and the regular ed teachers and anyone else that may be involved. There's been a case this year where we've had to bring in people from the outside and bring them in and say we need to have a collaborative meeting because this just isn't working because we don't see eye-to-eye. You know, this person sees it this way, this person sees it this way. We've got all this input but no one agrees, and we're not doing anything to help this child. I actually have helped set up a collaborative meeting with the players because we needed to get on the same page. I've learned

over the years it’s okay to disagree as long as you do it in a professional manner and you’re doing it for the right reasons which is not for personal gain or to make the teachers feel better. If you’re doing it to help that student because that’s what it should always be about. So it’s been a little awkward, you know. Well, we've actually gone from not wanting inclusion, thinking it couldn't work to accepting inclusion and having a plan where you were required to be the general ed inclusive teacher for three years then you rolled off for two years to people asking to be the inclusion teacher and not wanting to roll off until we got so much feedback on everybody wanting the support in their classroom. At this point in time, we have changed our whole structure. Every single classroom is an inclusive classroom. Whether there's a child that is certified with special needs or not we have someone who supports every classroom teacher thirty minutes, at least thirty minutes during our literacy block and thirty minutes during our math block. So we've gone from the idea of no inclusion to no one wants to be left out. They see the value of all that extra support, and so it's required now that every – every classroom gets that support. There’s just no doubt that our teachers are absolutely sold. They only see the benefits, and, certainly, they can't come up with any disadvantages. But it's taken this many years to get to that point.

Teacher 1 made comments that were relevant to winning teacher support as well. She explained that she has received positive feedback about inclusive practices from the standpoint of general education teachers' being appreciative for having another teacher in the room. She perceived this as being lucky. She believed that the positive feedback is, in part, responsive to the parental and student support for inclusive practices as they evolved over the years.

Teacher 4 described her view of challenges that have resulted because of the philosophy of inclusion and inclusive practices that are evident in P. T. Mackley. She stated her notions in the following manner:

> Regular teachers, who may not want that and have been teaching for a long time, so that's a hard change. I understand. It's their classroom and here you're the new guy stepping in. So breaking the boundary is a challenge, I think, for everybody. Then once they do it and they realize the benefit, it gets better. That's a challenge. Scheduling is a challenge and having enough personnel. In my old job, I could have a caseload of 38, and I could have an assistant myself. We could serve a lot of children at the same time. That's a part of the school having to make sure in the scheduling that these children are grouped in the classrooms where inclusion would be made possible so that I'm there to help all of them.

Stakeholder support. The level of stakeholder support has evolved at P. T. Mackley over time. The principal spoke about the teachers as stakeholders and the evolution of

their acceptance of inclusive practices. She spoke specifically about the change in teacher attitudes about participating in the inclusion process. Her perception captures the overall change of teacher attitudes and how that change emerged by making gradual adjustments. Teacher 3 made comments that supported the principal's comments in that she described a systematic process of gaining stakeholder support over an 11 to 12 year period. The principal's comments were as follows:

> Well, we've actually gone from not wanting inclusion, thinking it couldn't work to accepting inclusion and having a plan where you were required to be the general ed inclusive teacher for three years then you rolled off for two year to people asking to be the inclusion teacher and not wanting to roll off until we got so much feedback on everybody wanting the support in their classroom. At this point in time, we have changed our whole structure. Every single classroom is an inclusive classroom. Whether there's a child that is certified with special needs or not we have someone who supports every classroom teacher thirty minutes, at least thirty minutes during our literacy block and thirty minutes during our math block. So we've gone from the idea of no inclusion to no one wants to be left out. They see the value of all that extra support, and so its' required now that every – every classroom gets that support. There's just no doubt that out teachers are absolutely sold. They only see the benefits, and, certainly, they can't com up with any disadvantages. But it's taken this many years to get to that point.

The building level administrators are the most influential members of the stakeholder group. The principal and the assistant principal provided individual responses to Sections

III and Section IV of Principal and Inclusion Survey to provide some insight regarding their level of support in relationship to their attitudes and ideas about special education placement. Section III required responses on a Likert Scale and assesses attitudes about inclusion. The principal disagreed with the statement that it should be law that students with severe/profound disabilities are integrated into regular educational programs and activities and she agreed that, in general, students with severe/profound disabilities should be placed in special classes/schools specifically designed for them. In responding to appropriate placements for students with disabilities, she indicated that students with most disabilities should participate in full-time regular education with support. However, she added a written statement that indicated that she believes that individual student differences should govern decisions for students with autism, serious emotional disturbances, and neurological impairments. Further, she thought that students with mental retardation should participate in regular classroom instruction and resource room support.

Like the principal, the assistant principal disagreed with the statement indicating that it should be policy or law that students with severe/profound disabilities are integrated into regular education programs and activities. However, in contrast to the principal, the assistant principal disagreed with a statement that suggested that the appropriate placement for students with severe/profound disabilities was special classes/schools designed for them. The assistant principal's answers on the section of the survey suggested that students with various disabilities should receive full-time regular education with support. However, she indicated that students with mental retardation

should receive part-time special education classes. She qualified her response to students with autism, neurological impairment by writing a statement suggesting that the severity of these two disabilities should influence the placement decision. Generally, these responses support what the administrators stated in their interviews. They were forthright in stating that their dilemma was making inclusive decisions in academic areas for students that were more than two academic grade levels behind.

Table 14 represents the observed behaviors recorded during structured observations of the principals and special education teachers. These observations occurred during IEP meetings, classroom observations, a visitor tour of the school for an outside group conducted by the principal, and observations of principals conducting routine duties. The inclusive behaviors on the chart were arranged in ascending order to establish a median and search for trends within the data. According to the combined observation results of the two principals and five special education teachers at the P. T. Mackley site, the behaviors observed that occurred for the highest percentages of occurrences within the 90-minute observation sessions were participation in IEP meetings, communication with parents, positive interactions with students, encouraging academic success, and positive interactions with staff. Behaviors observed at a medium percentage of occurrences during the sessions were observes classroom activities, facilitates inclusive planning, facilitates provisions for resources, and verbalizes knowledge of students' strengths. The inclusive behaviors that were observed at the lowest percentage of occurrences during the 90-minute observation sessions were participates in team

Table 14

P. T. Mackley Structured Observation Results for All Participants

Behaviors	Percentages of Time for 90-Minute Observation Sessions
Participates in team planning	0
Evaluates the physical plant	6
Verbalizes commitment to include students with disabilities	6
Communicates directly with special education staff	6
Successes celebrated	28
Knowledge of differentiated curriculum	28
Expresses inclusive vision	44
Verbalizes knowledge of students' strengths	44
Facilitates provisions for resources	56
Facilitates inclusive planning	61
Observes classroom activities	61
Collaboration with students	78
Supports necessary accommodations	78
Collaboration with staff	83
Positive interaction with staff	94
Encouraging academic success	94
Positive interaction with students	100
Communication with parents	100
Participates in IEP Meetings	100

planning, evaluates the physical plant, verbalizes commitment to include students with disabilities, and communicates directly with special education staff.

While this staff exhibited many of the inclusive behaviors listed on the observation instrument, areas where low occurrences were observed were important. Communicating directly with special education staff was incongruent with the principal's perception that the special education teachers were the leaders in the school and frequently utilized as resources. At the same time, it would support the special education teacher's perception that there were still areas of need regarding acceptance by some general education teachers.

Chapter Summary

P. T. Mackley Elementary is a kindergarten through fifth grade school in a large school district. The school sits on the fringe of a metropolitan area near a university. The participants of the school boast of having an extensive history of inclusive practice that spans approximately 11 years. The school has a significant initiative that supports training special education teachers to implement school-wide inclusive practices in schools with environments that do not place these practices at the forefront of their beliefs and activities. While this school represents a proactive process concerning inclusion validated with commendations from the state for their efforts, they still saw a need for a continuum of services in the school which developed as the theme school-wide process. The continuum of services continued to reflect the understanding that service delivery models fall on a continuum that begins with the general education curriculum

and which is the least restrictive environment to a special education day school which is considered the most restrictive environment. Their perspective of the continuum is that it is imperative that they try and provide services for most students in the general education classroom with sufficient inclusive practices to ensure student success. There were different perspectives between the special education teachers and the building level administrators as to the appropriateness the placement on the continuum for some students with disabilities.

The second theme that was developed was the concept of implementing best practices. Participants believed that practices that promote inclusiveness were best practices in terms of teaching strategies, collaboration, and teacher empowerment which was implemented for the benefit of every child in the P. T. Mackley student population. P. T. Mackley participants indicated that the strategies that they implement should yield significant academic and social growth for all students without regard to whether or not students have disabilities. Their perception of collaborative was inclusive of all stakeholders identified in the community. This relationship had proven helpful with meeting needs regarding human resources, teaching materials, and needs relative to the physical plant. The school staff indicated that teacher empowerment involved appropriate and ongoing staff development and staying abreast of current research-based practices.

The third theme that was developed was the concept of an evolved process. The P. T. Mackley participants recognized that they have developed their status with years of work that reflected a vision established 11 to 12 years prior to the 2007-2008 school year. Those participants with perspectives that encompassed many of those years of

development and change provided a chronology that outlined changes in practices and attitudes that occurred as the process evolved and changed. While participants new to the school did not have the same depth of knowledge, they shared a more objective perception of the school status with regard to practices and attitudes. The different perceptions of the participants based on length of involvement allowed for a broader level of understanding of how inclusion and inclusive practices were understood at P. T. Mackley Elementary School. Tied to the evolved process is the perceptions of the building level administrators which still have unanswered concerns about students with lower cognitive functioning.

CHAPTER 6

A PORTRAIT OF PEACH MILL WITH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS FROM A SINGLE SITE

Chapter Introduction

In this chapter, I begin by painting a portrait of Peach Mill Elementary School. This portrait provides a description of the unique traditions of the school along with the school history and community characteristics. This thick, rich description assists in developing a contextual reference for the theme development which occurs after the characterization of the school. The development of themes results from the within-case analysis for this single-site. The themes answer the research questions for Peach Mill Elementary School. These themes will ultimately supply data for the cross-case analysis in Chapter 7.

School History

The 48 years old Peach Mill Elementary School was constructed in 1960 on 19.67 acres of land located near the downtown area of a major city in the southeastern part of the United States. Because of the use of an abundance of glass the in the structure, the building became known as “The Glass School House.” Currently, the school is under the leadership of its sixth principal who took over the helm midyear during the 2007-2008 academic school year after the former principal left for a position in another state. In 1994, the school served over 1,000 students; however, extensive renovation in the area housing developments caused a decline in the school population. By 1997, the enrollment dropped to approximately 700 students because of the relocation of families to other

housing developments in the city. The student population stabilized until the 2002-2003 school year. At this time, another school opened taking part of the student population and causing a decline to 489 students. Subsequently, Peach Mill merged with another older elementary school creating a student population of 630 students. Because of an additional flux of families during the 2007-2008 school year, the current school population consists of 595 students.

Community Demographic

Peach Mill Elementary School is the only school in the district that primarily serves two public housing developments. The school environment consists of faculty and parents who attended Peach Mill when they were school age. The community zip code in which the school resides contains four additional public schools at all levels: two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. Three private schools are located in the community as well.

According to the most recent census, the average household income is $18, 331 with 1,249 households reporting incomes of less than $10,000. Of the employed parents of students attending Peach Mill, 83% work in service related occupations including food preparation or serving, building and ground maintenance, and healthcare support. Most employers in the area own restaurants, repair shops, convenience stores, and family run small businesses. No major businesses in the area provide employment. The average household income of Peach Mill parents is $14,018, which places them below the U. S. poverty figures.

The immediate area covers 1.9 square miles with 3,480 housing units containing a

population of 8,105 individuals living in the area. The staff provided information in their School Improvement Plan (2008) that indicated a consistent decrease in the community population from 2000 to 2008. While the population decreased, household incomes increased, but the percentage of racial and gender characteristics have remained unchanged since 2003. Households include 319 married couples with children and 2,276 single-parent households. In their School Improvement Plan the Peach Mill staff, estimated that 14% of their students reside in two parent households while 78% live with single parents and 8% live with their extended family or in foster care. The median age of heads of households is 24.3 years.

The community ethnic structure is outlined in Table 15. The ethnic structure is below the national percentages in all categories reported with the exception of African American. In this group, the percentage is significantly higher than the national percentage for that ethnic category.

School Demographics

During the 2007-2008 school, Peach Mill Elementary School served 595 students consisting of 312 males representing 52% of the student population and 283 females representing 48% of the student population. The largest number of students was of African American ethnicity. There were very small numbers in other ethnic categories. The school's ethnic pattern was reflective of the community as would be expected. Table 16 presents the ethnic demographics of the student population of Peach Mill.

Peach Mill Elementary provides instruction for classes that range from Early Childhood (EC), through fifth grade. The faculty and staff serving these students consist

Table 15

Peach Mill Community Racial and Ethnic Demographics

Race	Number	Percentage	Compared to National Percentage
White	101	1.2%	75.1
African American	7,938	98.0%	12.3
American Indian/ Alaska Native	5	.01%	0.9
Asian	8	.01%	3.6
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	2	.01%	0.0
Some other race	11	.14%	5.5
Two or more race	39	.48%	2.4
Hispanic or Latino	1	.01%	12.5

Table 16

Ethnic Structure of Peach Mill Student Population

Ethnicity	Number of Students
White	2
African American	590
American Indian	0
Hispanic	2
Asian/Pacific Islander	1

of 44 teachers: 35 classroom teachers, five support teachers, one resource teacher, one teacher of the visually impaired, and two speech therapists. In addition, 27 teacher assistants support the educational program at the school along with a school psychologist and OT/PT personnel funded by special education and Title I.

Two African American female administrators provide leadership for the school. The gender structure of the teaching staff consists of 3 males and 41 females. The staff's ethic configuration is 78% African American and 22% White. Seventy-two percent of the teachers have advanced degrees and all are highly qualified according to state standards endorsed by the No Child Left Behind Act. Table 17 shows the numbers of classes and levels. The data indicated that an evenly distributed pupil teacher ratio exists across grade levels with the fourth and fifth grades having the largest ratios. The self-contained special education classes have ratios of 10:1, which is achieved through the inclusion of teaching assistants assigned to each class.

During the 2007-2008 school year, the school served 212 students identified as students with disabilities under IDEA 2004. The School Improvement Plan (2008) characterized their special education program as a "modified inclusion program." The description of the program suggested that this means all students are included in support classes (music, library, art, and physical education) with students included for pre-academics in Pre- kindergarten and academics in fifth grade. The 212 students with special education needs include 59 students in CDC, 27 in resource, 10 students with visual impairments, and 116 students with speech/language impairments. Nine special education teachers, 13 teaching assistants, two speech therapists, and OT/PT personnel

Table 17

Peach Mill Distribution of Classes

Grade Level	Number of Classes	Student/Teacher Ratio
Early Childhood	3	20:1
Kindergarten	5	20:1
1st Grade	5	20:1
2nd Grade	5	20:1
3rd Grade	4	20:1
4th Grade	3	25:1
5th Grade	3	25:1
Special Education Self-Contained	7	10:1

provide these services as required. Though located near the special education classrooms, one part-time and two full-time nurses are available to provide medical assistance to all students in the school when needed.

Peach Mill is an urban school that qualifies for Title 1 designation because of the poverty rate of the school population. As a Title 1 school, funds are available to support the school in various areas. Among the extra resources are provisions for professional development or training for teachers, parents, and paraprofessionals. Additionally, funding has been provided for school-wide intervention programs, materials, light snacks, and additional resources for students such as free after school tutoring for all students during the regular academic year.

Data available regarding student achievement are reported in the School Improvement Plan (2008) and the state department website as well. The school was in good standing according to NCLB standards. This status has been maintained since 2004 through the 2007. The 2003 status reported the school as targeted assistance. The 2008 NCLB reported returned the school to the status of requiring targeted assistance. The school has consistently worked to meet the standards necessary to stay in good standing, but will need to work toward re-establishing the good standing for the 2008-2009 school year. Based on the population of the school, subgroups tracked for Adequate Yearly Progress were African American, economically disadvantaged, and students with disabilities.

The disaggregated data supplied information necessary for the school staff to make decisions regarding the academic goals that required their intensive intervention. All three groups that met the criteria for consideration as subgroups met federal benchmarks

in reading/language arts, and mathematics. It was noted that the students with special needs taking the regular state assessment were making progress towards meeting the district and state requirements. However, a significant number of students in the special education population were assessed on the alternative portfolio assessment. It is noteworthy that while the 2008 report card for the school's achievement scores are mathematics D; reading/language arts D; social studies F; and science F, the academic growth for the same period are mathematics A; reading/language arts A; social studies A, and science A. These data indicate that the students made adequate yearly progress by meeting standards through the safe harbor provision of NCLB indicating that the deficits were reduced by 10% from the previous year's data. Peach Mill recorded 631 discipline referrals during the 2007-2008 school year, which was a significant increase from the 360 occurrences recorded during the 2006-2007 school year according to the School Improvement Plan (2008). Of the referral reported in 2008, 94 resulted in suspensions.

Peach Mill listed four areas of strength noted in their School Improvement Plan (2008). These identified strengths are as follows:

- One hundred percent of Peach Mill Elementary School students participated in standardized testing.
- The attendance of students at Peach Mill Elementary met NCLB's AYP requirement through safe harbor.
- Peach Mill Elementary made AYP in reading and mathematics through safe harbor.

- One hundred percent of the students with special needs were proficient according to alternative portfolio assessment. (p. 50)

Figure 7 represents the 2007 and 2008 performance data for the school. The data displayed reading and mathematics because these are the core academic subjects considered for determining adequate yearly progress.

Using the performance data, the school outlined a prioritized list of targeted goals in the School Improvement Plan (2008) which are listed below.

- Increase the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced in math as measured by the 2007 state assessment from 77% to 87% in 2008 in order to meet or exceed NCLB benchmark.
- Increase the percentage of student scoring proficient or advanced in reading, language arts, and writing as measured by the 2007 state assessment from 77% to 89% in 2008 in order to met or exceed NCLB benchmark.
- Increase the percentage of 5th grade students coring proficient on the 5th grade 2007 state writing assessment from 48% to 58%.
- Increase the number of students coring proficient/advanced in science by 10% in each grade [level] by 2009 …
- Increase the number of students scoring proficient/advanced in social studies by 10% in each grade [level] by 2009 …
- Increase attendance form 92.2% to 95% which exceeds the NCLB attendance requirement

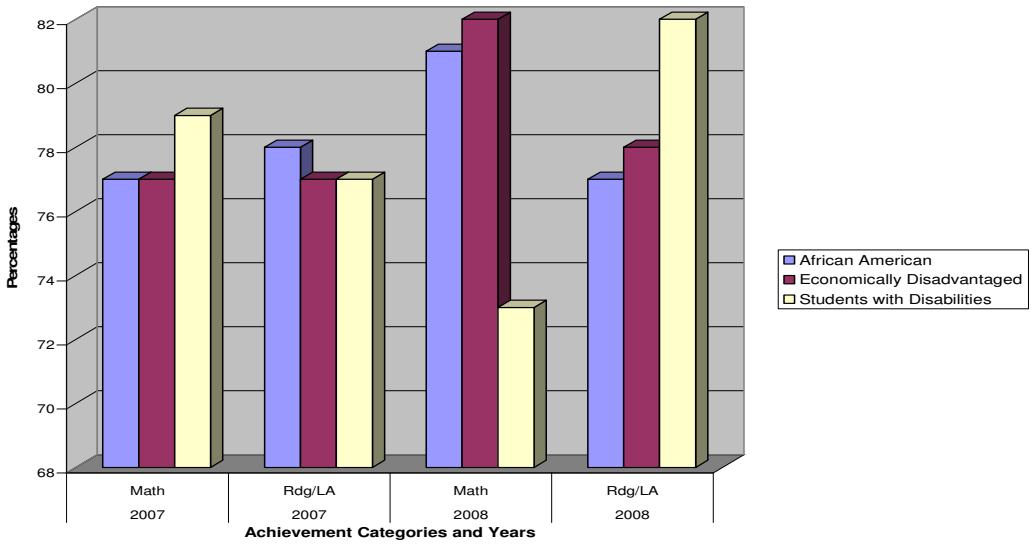

Figure 7. Peach Mill adequate yearly progress for 2007 and 2008.

- Decrease the number of student discipline referrals in 2008 by 10% from 631 to 568. (p. 51)

Data available for the school regarding school academic achievement, discipline, and attendance provided the information for the school staff to make data-driven decisions regarding the focus of the school. The fact that the school was in good standing from 2004 until 2008 indicates that the staff and students are working to meet the standards outlined in the NCLB Act. The decline during the 2007-2008 school could reflect the change of school leadership during the 2007-2008 school. The 2008-2009 school year might provide data that indicate positive outcomes if the leadership remains stable. Interventions and activities in place to create an environment in which academic growth takes place have been implemented at Peach Mill and are outlined in the School Improvement Plan. The outlined activities influence the academic performance of the students and are provided through the resources of all stakeholders.

School Characteristics

Peach Mill Elementary School has a unique story involving the school physical plant and the culture which has evolved over time. These two components provide a means of establishing the school personality. The description of the physical plant is objective because it is visual. Through examining the facility and looking at school maps or diagrams, a clear picture of the building is easily depicted. Discovering the culture of the school required observation and conversation with the stakeholders as well as

examination of documents. This section explores the characteristics of Peach Mill Elementary School through examination of the school plant and the culture.

School Plant

The school plant consists of three large two-story buildings connected by glass breezeways. This design engendered the nickname "The Glass School House." The buildings are assigned the labels A, B, and C. Though each building is distinct and separate, all three have the same basic floor plan. Buildings A and B each house 35 classrooms, a teacher workroom, a faculty lounge, and 4 student restrooms. The lower level of Building A has two music rooms, a physical education room, and an office for the City Housing Authority. There is one nurse station on the lower level of Building B located near the self-contained special education classes. Building C contains the administrative offices, cafetorium, food services, a primary physical education room, building maintenance facilities, a school store, and an in-school suspension room. One special education resource room is on the upper level in Building C. Approaching the entrance to the school, a long covered walkway leads to the main entrance; however, doors leading in and out of the cafetorium are on the right wall just prior to reaching the front doors. Standing in the glass breezeways, outside areas that have tables are visible and placed near each building on the inner courtyard.

Some improvements related to health and safety have occurred at the school. Air conditioning was installed in 1990. At the same time, asbestos was removed to provide a healthy environment for the school family. For security purposes, it is necessary to use an intercom to request and gain entrance into the building at all times when the school is in

session. The interior of the school was clean and neat though the exterior was in need of painting and the glass breezeways needed cleaning. According to the principal, some of the classrooms are empty due to the decrease in the student population in the community.

Culture

The complete name of the school is Peach Mill College Preparatory Elementary School. The school is referred as "the Home of the Royals." The mascot, Royals, appeared consistent with the school-wide theme of making the students feel valued, special, and capable. Every aspect of the school emphasizes creating an atmosphere of positive self-esteem and cultivating academic potential. Upon arriving at the school, guests move up a long walkway adorned with a series of banners suspended from the ceiling. Visitors progress from one banner to the next as they read "Welcome to Peach Mill Elementary School," "A College Preparatory School," "Every Child, Every Parent, Every Teacher," Treated Like Royalty," "Everyday." The last banner over the main entrance door contained the school slogan, "Every Child Everyday College Bound." In the main office, a bulletin board on the wall displayed the caption "Home of the Peach Mill Royals." Underneath the caption, were three questions with answers, which were as follows: What are you going to be? – Successful; Where are you headed? - to college; and, When are you going to start? – right now. At the bottom of the display were "The Three R's: Reading, Respect, Responsibility."

The interior walls of the halls and cafetorium that students access daily provide additional space to remind students of the school focus. The hall ceilings near the cafetorium display banners that recognize 12 adopters in the business community that

support the work of the school. The hall wall outside of the cafetorium displays the school mission, vision, and "Royal Rules: Be Ready, Be Respectful, Be Responsible." College banners from colleges and universities across the United States are suspended from the ceilings of the halls and the cafetorium. Other reminders for the students are displays of graphs depicting the school's academic achievement and target data for reading and mathematics. The principal made morning and afternoon announcements and usually ended with an expectation such as "We expect for you the pursuit of excellence."

One bulletin board display titled "Drop in the Bucket" offered teachers the opportunity to make public their commitment to the students. Some of the notable quotes are documented in the following statements:

> "I will maintain a positive classroom the entire year and make every student feel important."
>
> "I want to make sure that each student reaches their academic goal and feel special during the process."
>
> "I will give every student everyday a positive drop in the bucket that focuses on their strengths and or natural abilities and encourage students to do the same for each other."
>
> "I commit to keep a positive attitude about the differences among my students. I will learn to accept each student as [a] unique individual. I will help my students to identify the positive aspects about themselves. We will all learn and grow together."

"I promise to fill the buckets of my students by getting to know them, and meeting whatever individual issues they may bring to the school proactively and with compassion."

The beliefs that the staff outlined were reported in their School Improvement Plan (2008) and guided the mission and vision that are displayed in the hall. The beliefs are as follows:

- Academic achievement is number one.
- Administrators, teachers, and support personnel provide a clear purpose and direction for achieving the school's goals.
- Administrators, teachers, support personnel, parents, and the community hold high expectations for all students.
- Policies and procedures are aligned to maintain a focus on achieving the school's goals for student learning.
- Administrators, teachers, support personnel, students, parents, and the community utilize research-based information and data to drive decisions.
- Students learn best when they are actively engaged in differentiated instruction that accommodates their needs and learning styles.
- Assessment of student learning should provide students with a variety of opportunities to demonstrate their achievement of the expectations for their learning.
- A safe and physically comfortable environment promotes student learning.

- The commitment to continuous improvement is imperative if our school is going to enable student to become confident, self-directed, lifelong learners.
- Collaboration among all staff and stakeholders is the key to goal attainment.

The mission of Peach Mill Elementary is "to implement a diversified learning program that addresses the individual needs of all students. All students will leave Peach Mill with the skills necessary to succeed in their future learning." This mission provided the direction for the vision, which is "The vision of Peach Mill Elementary School is to prepare all students for college by empowering them with the knowledge and skills to perform academically at all levels which will allow them to live successful and productive lives."

Two non-academic goals that the Peach Mill community decided to focus on were reducing discipline referrals and improving attendance. School adopters helped with these goals by providing significant motivators for students. Students with no office referrals for the entire school year had the opportunity to participate in special field trips at the end of the academic year. Further, students with perfect attendance received bicycles for their efforts. The bike give away occurred during the end of the year awards day activities (Field Notes, May 12, 2008).

To gauge the attitudes of stakeholders relative to the general climate of the school, staff, parents, and students completed school climate surveys Teachers reported that they believe every child can learn: 32.1% strongly agree and 57.1% agree. Further, teachers felt that they teach another way if students do not get it the first time: 32.1% strongly agree and 64.3% agree. Teachers also reported that by using various methods

of teaching they can get through to the most difficult or unmotivated students if they really try hard: 25.0% strongly agree and 64.3% agree. Sixty percent of parents surveyed indicated that they felt teachers work hard to meet the needs of their children. In addition, parents believed that their children are in a good and safe learning environment for their children. Parents believed that college preparation is the goal for their children. Likewise, 97.4% of the students reported they believe they are going to college. Further, 92% of students surveyed indicated that they believe teachers work hard to help them learn (School Improvement Plan, 2008, pp.12-13).

The start of the school day provided the opportunity to get an initial impression of the school atmosphere. In the early morning prior to going into the building for classes, students either go to the cafetorium for breakfast or wait outside. Students who do not eat breakfast get in line on the covered walkway. While lined up by grade levels, students receive supervision from school staff as they wait. The district adheres to a student dress code, which includes khaki or dark pants or skirts and polo style shirts. All students on the campus appeared appropriately attired.

Demographics for Research Participants

Table 18 provides a summary of the demographic make-up of the interviewees. These data were gathered at the onset of the interview process with each participant. The school has a principal and an assistant principal; however, the assistant did not participate in the data collection process. Four of the seven teachers of self-contained classes participated in the semi-structured interview and structured observation along with the resource

Table 18

Demographic Data of Peach Mill Interview Participants

Participants	General Education Teaching Experience	Special Education Teaching Experience	Years in Current School	Current Teaching Position
Principal	1 yr.	4 yrs.	3 yrs.	-
Teacher 1	0	14 yrs.	14 yrs.	Resource
Teacher 2	0	33.5 yrs.	7 yrs.	Self-contained Class
Teacher 3	0	5 yrs.	5 yrs.	Self-contained Class
Teacher 4	2 yrs.	5 yrs.	5 yrs.	Self-contained Class
Teacher 5	0	35 yrs.	27 yrs.	Self-contained Class

teacher. The maximum number of teachers specified for each site volunteered to participate in the research study.

Major Themes

The intent of this section is to examine data and explain the developed themes that answer the research questions. These data provide information to formulate the within-case analysis. Based on data generated from observations, a survey, the examination of documents, and interviews with the principal and five special education teachers, three themes were developed. These themes include conceptualizing a service continuum, the need for a paradigm shift, and developing an inclusive culture.

The data collected at Peach Mill Elementary was examined using content surface analysis producing many perceptions taken from the data sources. Pattern variables resulted which allowed the development of the three themes. The intent of this chapter is to expand upon the themes to explain how they represent Peach Mill Elementary School. A detailed discussion of the themes taken within the context provided regarding the school will make the theme development clear to readers.

Conceptualizing a Services Continuum

The first theme addresses research question 1 "How do elementary principals and special education teachers make sense of inclusion and inclusive practices?" As the special education teachers and the principal addressed the first question of how they make sense out of inclusion and inclusive practices, they suggested that they must conceptualize a service continuum. The special education teachers described a continuum of services for the students enrolled in the special education program at Peach Mill

Elementary. The definition of what a continuum of services is as they understand it is consistent with the understanding other special educators interviewed at the previous sites discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. They described the status of the setting in which they work considering that the school is the hub for service delivery for students with moderate to severe disabilities from across the district. The school houses a large number of special education classes most of which are self-contained settings. Most of the special education teachers do not believe that a full inclusion model should be the model implemented in the school. They tended to express conservative opinions relative to how they conceptualize a service continuum. They spoke of valuing student, accepting students, and appreciating their likenesses and differences, but they were clear that the task before them involves creating a solid philosophy among their stakeholders regarding inclusion and inclusive practices.

Nurturing inclusive attitudes. The special education teachers and principal saw the need to nurture inclusive attitudes in the school setting. They saw a separateness between the general education population and the population of students with disabilities. Thus, they thought that nurturing inclusive attitudes would assist with promoting a conceptual understanding of a continuum of services. They explained the steps they believe are necessary to do that. In doing so, they expressed their perceptions of inclusion. Upon close examination, nurturing inclusive attitudes surfaced as necessary for general education teachers and general education students. Teacher 1 has 14 years of special education teaching experience all of which has been at Peach Mill. She teaches in a resource setting though she previously worked in a self-contained classroom for 6 years.

She spoke of how she attempts to nurture an inclusive attitude with the general education teachers by making sure she is available for planning. She facilitates a resource model and students that she serves in fifth grade reading in a general education setting have participated in an academic inclusive setting. She made the following statement regarding assisting general education teachers in inclusive classrooms:

> I work with them in their planning and implementation. My room provides as a place to pull materials to assist in the lesson. We come up here [to her room] and they can check out things, check out items, whatever they need to implement the lesson that we've helped design. Each year, I give a list of ways to modify lessons, ways to modify content, ways to modify – it's not just if I have twenty [item on a worksheet or in a textbook] give them ten. That's not really the only way to modify so we talk about what modifications really can entail.

She explained that by focusing on what appropriate accommodations and modifications involve, she is able to demonstrate and communicate how students with disabilities can work successfully in the general education classroom. This effort assists and supports general education teachers in embracing the possibilities for the students. This special educator also emphasized that we can address attitudes through focusing on building positive relationships between those involved in the process.

The principal's teaching background includes general education and special education experience. She explained that she wants the perception of the school staff to encompass the idea that all students represent an important part of the school environment. She explained her perception of inclusive practice and how she believes it should be defined.

She did not claim that her staff is at this point in terms of their beliefs. She pointed out that within an inclusive environment all students should be exposed to quality teaching. She expressed the following thoughts:

> I define inclusion as the integration or the coeducation of children of varying ability Levels … that's what it is for me. Of course, the buzz word inclusion to us now means a kid with special needs rolling on into the regular classroom. That is what they're thinking of it, but I just see it as school. I see it as school … Everybody counts! Everyone counts! Everyone counts! I want them [students and teachers] to understand that they're [students with disabilities] a little bit different, but they're still just as important as you are.

Teacher 3 has 5 years of special education teaching experience all acquired at Peach Mill. Her current assignment is in a self-contained special education classroom. She spoke about how she believes students and teachers must develop an attitude that positively embraces inclusive practice. She stated that students with special needs, as well as, the general education population get a chance to interact and develop a perception based on a familiarity of the students. This interaction allows the students to see a different side of students with special needs. Additionally, a deeper level of understanding can be developed that includes being cognizant of the potential of students with disabilities and special education teachers' skills that they bring to an inclusive environment. Teacher 3 detailed how there are times when some general education

students shy away from students with disabilities or will tease them. She stated that it becomes necessary to "zero in on this behavior" and address it. She added the following statement to her discussion when speaking about what students can learn in inclusive environments:

> I think it would help our regular kids too because we have a lot of them that when we'll go down the hall, they begin laughing and pointing. Students need to learn about people with disabilities … It's just a learning experience and it's just one of the things that you need to be exposed to because you're exposed to everything outside of this building when you go to the real world.

Positive benefits for students. The entire special education teacher participants centered their discussions regarding the positive benefits of inclusive practices on the same kind of concepts. The teachers spoke of tolerance and acceptance being a benefit that develops when students have close contact to see the strengths and characteristics that each one in the classroom possesses. Along with the principal, the special education teachers spoke of the benefit for students with disabilities to have exposure to the curriculum and a teacher who is highly qualified in specific content areas. Teacher 1 pointed out that there are students without disabilities that benefit from modifications and alternative strategies because they have learning needs. Another benefit mentioned by the staff was that the experience tended to boost the confidence of the students with disabilities. This increased self-confidence appeared to come from having exposure to students who modeled age appropriate social skills. These teachers indicated that these

benefits and efforts can assist with helping stakeholders to conceptualize a service continuum that brings both general education and special education together and minimizes the separation that they currently experience to a larger degree than they believe is appropriate.

The principal also explained that she believes that parents can provide a gauge to determine if an inclusive instructional setting is positive for all students in the room. She stated that parents of students in inclusive classrooms would voice concerns if they sense that the classroom is not providing maximum learning experiences for their children. She described what she thinks those indicators include.

> It's important that they [parents] believe that that teacher is going to provide the quality of teaching that their child deserves to have and that that teacher will not sacrifice their general education student for the sake of a [child with mental retardation]. It's important for the parents to believe that. And they believe that by observation, by conversation, by what they're seeing when their children come home, their children's work, and then their children talking about it also. The children in the room should know, hey – in other words, they shouldn't see it as different classroom. The children should see it as our classroom. So when the children see there's a major difference with kids coming in then you got a problem. But if they see it as this is our classroom, this is our room and our students then it's

different … If I were to informally evaluate it, those are the things I would consider.

At the same time, the principal and special education teachers were clear in stating that they believed that the same level of inclusion experiences was not appropriate for all students. Within the context of the classes they served, the special education teachers explained what they perceived as the most inclusive settings for their students. None of the special education teachers indicated that they believed that all students should be in general education classes all day, but most of them appeared to believe that their students should be included more than they have been up to this point. They were specific in their explanation regarding the practices at Peach Mill Elementary. While focusing on her resource setting, Teacher 1 stated the following pertaining to including students with special needs in classrooms for academics:

> Inclusion is not for every child. I don't believe, as an educator, it will work for every child. It just doesn't. I think that when you have a child that it can work for, it can only benefit. We live in a world with people who have differences, and I don't see why we shouldn't start right here in the school building. Inclusion, for me, is just like what I – actually what I do in here. I teach to the needs. Giving the modifications is just making the playing ground fair. That's all. It's leveling the playing ground. We're not "dumbing" down the information, but we are bringing it to a level where every child can be included. Inclusion is just allowing everyone to experience good teaching, everyone to experience the learning that comes from the interaction

with their peers and allowing growth. I just think that everybody should be given that opportunity. If it doesn't work, it's not ingrained in stone.

Teacher 5 has 35 years of special education teaching experience 27 of which were at Peach Mill. He teaches a self-contained class of students with moderate to severe involvement. He was willing to participate in the interview, but he was unwilling to have his interview taped. However, he expressed his impressions to the interview questions. He questioned how to reconcile placing students in general education settings by functioning levels or chronological age when considering their functioning levels. His opinion was that chronological age placement was for socialization purposes for the members of his class. He acknowledged that exposure to students functioning at low levels was of benefit for general education teachers and students so they would experience a more diverse group. He did not believe that the expectations are clear in the school.

Participation by all stakeholders. The Peach Mill Elementary principal and special education teachers indicated that in order to conceptualize a special education service continuum for the school all stakeholders must participate in the process. Stakeholders were defined as students, parents, teachers, and school administration. Teacher 3 provided a comprehensive view of stakeholder involvement and the implications of this participation. She expressed the following perspective:

Inclusion is a process. It has to be well thought out. It has to be a well thought out process where everybody's involved. If you just picked a child down

here [refers to the lower level of the building where most all of the self-contained classes reside] and stuck them in a class upstairs then maybe they would be infringing on their rights [of general education students], but I think if you inform the parents as to what's going on, let them know about the children who will be in the classroom, not necessarily identify who they are but different behaviors or characteristics they may have, teaching the students that are in the regular ed class, informing the parents about what's going to be going on, teaching the students about different types of kids that will possibly be in the classroom, and there will have to be administrative support for that. Regular education and special teachers both will have to be on the same page as far as how to best meet the child's needs.

Teacher 3 continued her discussion as follows:

If it's not well thought out it can be a disaster. Some people just are not going to agree with it. I don't care how much you try to teach them something, try to inform them of the process, they're just not going to agree with you. I think the main thing is if it's not well thought out. If it's not well thought out and all stakeholder involved (which includes parents, teachers, students, administration) and if you're not all on the same page, you're going to have some issues.

As the special education teachers and principal of Peach Mill Elementary School considered conceptualizing a service continuum, they considered the activities necessary to assist stakeholders to embrace to solidify their concept of a service continuum. These activities included nurturing inclusive attitudes, verbalizing positive benefits for students,

and encouraging participation by all stakeholders. While all of the special education teachers expressed ideas regarding inclusion that were philosophical in nature, some explained it in terms that described a place on the continuum rather than the continuum of services being impacted by appropriate inclusive practices.

Need for a Paradigm Shift

The second theme answered the second research question "How do elementary principals and special educations teachers explain inclusive implementation practices in their schools?" When the available data was analyzed, the analysis indicated that participants recognized the need for changing ideas and philosophical perspectives in the school. Whether during the formal interview or casual conversation, the special education teachers and principal expressed a need for a paradigm shift at Peach Mill Elementary.

Recognizing status. Participants described the status at the school and spoke of a shift that needs to occur within the school culture, but the teachers expressed limited active roles that they play in facilitating that shift. The study participants indicated that their start should be the task of recognizing and acknowledging their status.

Teachers involved in self-contained classes described situations in which students in their classes only attend support classes. Teacher 2 stated that her students go to music, physical education, library, and art; however, the special education assistant always goes with them. Teacher 3 described the same schedule for her class, but she provided some insights regarding the extent to which her students interact with general education teachers which was limited.

> The only interaction my students have with a regular teacher would be their support teachers. I just get the regular teacher up to speed on the child ...That way there're no surprises. Some of them are better at working with students with special needs. I mean we give input back and forth. They show me things I can do in class, and I give them input as to how they can work with a child in theirs. My students go to PE, music, art, library, and we go to lunch, but we go to lunch as a group.

Teacher 5 described a similar experience as Teacher 3 though he enumerated some experiences for his students that included involvement with a general education classroom's morning routine. He explicated his situation as involving his class with a class that is chronologically younger than are his self-contained students. He tended to believe this was the best setting for the students in his classroom.

> The TA [teaching assistant] always attends when students go to support classes. For inclusion, the students go into the early childhood classroom for the morning routine. They go in the morning when they're doing pre-academic skills. My students are 5 and 6 years old. The students in the early childhood class are 4 years old. The students would be going to kindergarten if they were going with their chronological peers, but since they are small and developmentally more appropriate with the 4 year old students, this seems to work best.

Teacher 4 has 2 years of teaching in a general education setting 5 years in a special education classroom. She has worked at Peach Mill for 5 years in a self-contained

classroom setting. Students in her class are included in a fifth grade general education reading class. She explained how this was planned and implemented this school year. She expressed a positive impression about the experience outlined for the students that participated. She delineated the status of her inclusion participation in an academic class which did not include her entire class.

> We did inclusion with the fifth grade. We looked at the IQ. We looked at the ages, In addition, we looked at the ability to work with other kids. We started out on a trial basis to see how my students would interact with the regular population students and we had a pretty good year. I had two girls and two boys go into a regular fifth grade class. We just matched them up with the regular ed students. The regular ed students would join in helping them to stay on schedule and on task. The resource teacher, a teaching assistant, a regular fifth grade teacher, and I helped to monitor the class. They were in the class for reading. As we planned, we discussed what the disabilities are and made plans as far as how we were going to monitor or how we were going to present which lessons. I go over the reading a lot of times with my students while we're in here [her self-contained classroom] then it helps to prepare them more for when we go there [general education classroom] so they won't be as lost. It makes my student feel more comfortable if we've kind of touched base on the story. I may send the textbook home with them for the parent to read the story with them that night or if we have time in class to do it.

Outlining change needs. The principal and special education teachers indicated that they did not believe that the program at the school was as inclusive as it should be and they articulated changes necessary to improve the special education program at their school. These changes have the potential for contributing significantly to the needed paradigm shift. They identified changes that require acquisition of resources, which includes human resources and teaching materials. Teacher 1 pointed out that many times they are the last ones to receive textbooks and needed materials from general education unless they become pushy which might or might not work. The principal and Teacher 1 pointed out that additional special education staff is needed to implement inclusive opportunities in academic settings because one resource teacher and her assistant are unable to get to each grade level so what they were able to offer during the 2007-2008 school year was limited.

The principal described the status of Peach Mill in the following manner:

> Right now, again, we're feeling our way through it, so right now in K through five inclusion means that you go to support class with children with special needs, multiple handicapped, breathing tube, all of that for support classes one hundred percent is what we do right now for inclusion K through five. It means that when You are in music class you have twenty general end students. You may have five from a MH [multi-handicapped] class. They come in with wheelchairs with their teacher assistant with them, and they're mixed in side by side with my general ed

students, not behind them in the cut, mixed in with them side by side during music instruction. Right now, that's what it looks like. During library time mixed in with them doing book reading during library time. In PE throwing a ball back and forth with them that's what it looks like right now in our setting K through five. In pre-K what it looks like is they're included for their social activity parts right now in pre-K. In fifth grade they're included also –along with the support class, they're included also for reading instruction as well. So you could say pre-K through five social, physical activity, music, PE, art, library. As for fifth grade, the academic part is included the reading time. That's what it looks like right now.

The principal and the special education teachers suggested that professional development and building relationships were necessary to address apprehensive general education teachers. The principal explained that special education teachers are included in the same trainings available for the general educators. The special education teachers have district trainings provided for their participation as a part of their contract requirements. Currently, this is how professional development is approached at Peach Mill. The principal stated that appropriate training and exposure is the manner by which doubts of the general education teachers should be addressed. She expressed a desire to emphasize inclusive practice through appropriate training for her school staff.

Teacher 3 described the status and changes needed in the school as it related to her class. Though focusing on her particular class, she mirrored the perspective shared by

other special education teachers at Peach Mill who teach in self-contained classrooms. She shared the following observation:

> I would like to see that population of students be able to do more. I mean even if it's not within the schools just be able to go out in the community and be able to experience things because a lot of students, and that's speaking of all – all students here, but a lot of students don't get those opportunities outside of school … I would like for special ed to break out of just support classes.

Inconsistent progress. Another area outlined by the special education teachers was the inconsistency of the progress toward more inclusive practices in the school. They suggested that inconsistency is a by-product of the need for a paradigm. The teachers suggested that these inconsistencies existed in the areas of teacher attitude and knowledge, as well as, the basic philosophy that individuals held regarding students with disabilities. Teacher 5 suggested that doubts and negative attitudes regarding teaching students with disabilities was "a battle fought for years." He suggested that addressing this situation at the teacher preparation level is the means by which stakeholders should address broadening the awareness and understanding of the characteristics of students with disabilities and improving teaching strategies to address these specific needs. Teacher 2 stated that it was difficult to get general education teachers to view students with disabilities "just as kids" without focusing on the disabilities. Because special education personnel accompany students in her self-contained class to support classes, it is difficult for the general education teachers to play an active role in the participation of her students in their classes. When questioned about this practice, she stated that allowing

students to go to a support class without special education personnel being present was not an accepted practice.

Conversely, Teacher 4 expressed positive strides made in the inclusive setting in which she was involved during the 2007-2008 academic school year. She stated that her initiatives and suggestions for the inclusive classroom were received and implemented. She shared thoughts about this positive environment.

> Now, with our inclusion this year the regular ed teacher was very acceptable to our suggestions and ideas. She would basically go along. If we wanted to try it this way or try it that way, she was a hundred percent behind us, so I didn't have that problem this year. Mostly, we would just sit down and discuss ways that we would do whatever we were going to do. She would listen and most of the time be in agreement or willing to try it that way.

Teacher 2 highlighted her understanding of what the school goal was this year for inclusive practice. She explained her perception of what was expected. The expectations included inclusive experience for her class because she taught a self-contained fifth grade classroom though not all of her students participated in the academic inclusive opportunity in general education reading instruction.

> It’s my understanding that the goal is to have one class mainstreamed into some of the academics this year and to the appropriate grade level. It’s also my understanding it's not – well, it's mainstreaming but it's not really inclusion unless it's on the right age level–age and grade appropriate. My own class goes in with the other fifth grade and they're downstairs together with them, which that part's good. We’re included

with all the support classes except science. We don't go to science.

Teacher 2 has taught for 33.5 years all of which has been in special education. She has taught in a self-contained classroom at Peach Mill for the last 7 years. She explained what she would like to see happen at Peach Mill with regard to inclusive practice. As she outlined her hopes, she provided additional information that suggested that there has been inconsistent progress towards more inclusive practices at the school. Her expressed observations and hopes follow:

> I would have some of the regular children coming into our classrooms more, not just us going to their rooms. Three to four kids at a time working with ours students tutoring them on some early academics and, at the same time, working on social and interaction skills. Not this year but last year, we actually ate lunch with fifth graders at the same table, not at our assigned table. Of course, it was different tables and maybe it was two years ago. The tables were set up differently in the cafeteria. But you know, we had to have the same lunch period, and they would help walk down with the kids. They would just help them stay in line and wash their hands. It's like each of them almost had a partner. It was a lot of different type of inclusion, not just academic but a little bit of everything.

Teacher 3 explained the impact of having the school administration change in the middle of the school year. She was open about the effort started with her class that did not realize fruition. Her explanation was as follows:

> The one teacher down here that does inclusion other than support class would be Ms. S., and it seems that the students she has done that with seem to have gotten

something out of it. It seems to have worked well for her because she and the general education teacher did it in a team teaching style. Earlier this school year when we had a different principal before he left, we were trying to implement that kind of style with my class, but it was very difficult because my kids are bigger. They're bigger kids, but the developmental levels are low. Some of them are actually lower than pre-K. Therefore, it wouldn't really flow right. If we did it chronologically, my students would be lost if we put them with their age level. If we place them developmentally, it wouldn't be age appropriate. It really did not get off the ground. It was like a suggestion because Ms. S had done her class like that this year and I think last year as well, and we just wanted to expand it out some more. You know, get some other folks in there, but when it came around to looking at my kids and which ones could possibly benefit, it just never went anywhere.

The special education teachers expressed the general perceptions that Peach Mill required much work that involves a shift in the attitudes, knowledge, and skills of many of the general education teachers at the school. These teachers made comparisons between the school and other settings in which they had taught or of which they were aware. One teacher talked about model schools that she read about or viewed television programs regarding such programs. The participants indicated that an honest examination and acknowledgement of their status was where they needed to begin. As a result of this examination, they could outline changes needed to assist with their vision of a more inclusive school environment. Finally, they saw a need to address different variables that

created inconsistent progress that caused them fail to continue to move forward in their efforts.

Develop an Inclusive Culture

The third theme answers the third research question "How are espoused beliefs of elementary principals and special education teachers evident in the implementation of inclusive practices in their schools?" To address the third research question, the participants recognized that their beliefs must lead to a stronger development of an inclusive culture. The Peach Mill staff recognized that the culture of the school has to change in order to implement the type of inclusive philosophy that promotes acceptance of all students in the school environment with an expanded array of experiences that are inclusive.

Positive parental support. Parents made up the stakeholder group that the teachers believed expressed the most positive support for the school. In the kind of support described, parents placed a lot of trust in the school staff to implement programs that were in the best interest of their children though they do not fully understand the philosophy of inclusion. The participants indicated that they are focusing on the parents to initiate the development of an inclusive culture. The principal explained the parental support from the trust perspective. Her comments follow:

> Well, I don't think that we do a very good job of communicating the inclusion model to our parents to get feedback from them on it. They just know their children are included and they really don't know all that really means. They know that it's better, that it means more time around regular ed children, but I don't think they really, really

understand or have the full grasp of the concept to get a full opinion from the parents. They just trust us to do the best for their child, and they know that this is a least restrictive environment … I can describe one notable experience that was probably last year. The children who were in CDC and resource scored well on the state writing test after they had been in inclusion for writing instruction.

Teacher 4 provided insight about her perceived her rapport with parents as good. She believed that many parents were pleased to see their children "mainstreaming" with students in the general education setting. She explained that parents are aware that students go to lunch, PE, library, art and other support activities, but they offer positive comments at IEP meetings when they hear various activities that the team wants to implement with their children. This teacher also pointed out that in the art class her students' works become a part of the main hall display for everybody to see which produces additional opportunities to present the students positively. Therefore, parents see these positive efforts to include their children. By providing positive inclusive experiences that parent witness, captures the support of parents and allows them to see potential in their children.

Teacher 5 explained that the school engendered positive parental support by being sensitive to parental expectations that might appear unrealistic. He stated that the team might try to implement goals for students that they believe to be sufficiently higher than what is realistic, but they want parents to have the opportunity to realize through experience that the school team made recommendations based on experiences with specific students. Teacher 5 indicated that this assists the school team in gaining the trust

of their students' parents, which allows them to develop long-term relationships that foster confidence in the team's decision-making strategies.

Starting where we are. The principal made it clear that she is not satisfied with the current school culture. She suggested that her plans for the future for the school include transforming the school culture to a philosophy of inclusion. She stated that she must recognize where the school is at this point and begin to promote, support, and provide the necessary tools for all stakeholders to unite in their beliefs and practices. In an effort to promote enhanced inclusive opportunities between the two classes, the principal moved the general education preschool class on the same hall as the special education preschool class. She offered some observations regarding starting at the school's status to move forward.

> We're not in full inclusion yet. Right now we're implementing more inclusion in pre-K and fifth grade because we're still getting there. The feedback that I've received from those two grades is positive. Pre-K has loved it. It's been going very well for them. Having the proximity of them across the hall from each other has really, really helped. In fifth grade, it also helped. There has been a few problems in fifth grade. They only have one resource teacher, and so what happens is that when she's doing inclusion the fifth grade reading block is the same as first second, and third. Therefore, when the resource teacher is with fifth grade reading block, she misses reading block for the other classes and that has caused a problem to only have one resource teacher. That has been a problem because she wants to be with the other rooms as well. To address that problem, we've found that we could train and use

paraprofessionals in those rooms to support inclusion so that it's not only happening in just fifth grade, but it can happen in other grades, too though it may not happen five days a week. If I have two people that can do it now, one para-educator and one teacher, they can rotate but that requires scheduling. What we're doing for next year is seeing how we will be able to use the paraprofessionals to increase our person count to support inclusion in more grades besides pre-K and fifth. The majority of our para-pros work in multi-handicapped classrooms, and I can float one out. The one I'm floating out is the one that's going to do the inclusion, otherwise, we couldn't do it. If I keep going the way we're going right now it will only be one grade: fifth. It will be fifth because I only have one resource teacher. We're trying to increase our personnel to allow us to support inclusion in multiple grades.

Teacher 1 supported the principal's comments and noted that she is the teacher who participated in the academic inclusive reading class in fifth grade. She explained their implementation during the 2007-2008 school year and provided her teacher perspective about what the status is and what the needs are that will assist in working toward progress with their inclusive efforts. Teacher 1 believed that the fifth grade inclusion reading class was received well by general education teachers. Attempting to implement an inclusion math class was not possible with the current staffing pattern. She noted that teachers' apprehension about having another adult in the classroom was replaced with positive feedback when they realized what a help a second teacher could be especially when treated as a teaching colleague rather than a teaching assistant. Teacher 1 stated that by taking the helm for writing instruction she was able to introduce different

strategies, which resulted in the improved state writing assessment scores noted for students in special education and students not identified as well.

While the principal noted that positive experiences were possible for the preschool classes because she moved the general education preschool to the wing that previously housed all special education classes so inclusive experienced could be increased, Teacher 2 did not believe that the special education students were welcomed in the classroom by the general education teacher. She reported that the experience had not gone well. Further, she explained that the students were not included in non-mandated activities. She explained that an effort to counteract this transpired, which involved the special education classes organizing a picnic and inviting the general education classes. She explained this as an effort to begin to build relationships with the general education teachers hoping that there would be open affiliations in the future. Teacher 2 outlined other efforts to build relationships, which included pairing her students with students in the general population to complete Christmas activities, drawing pictures, or other non-academic activities and noting the friendships cultivated between the students. She noted that the general education teacher and she noticed that the students were helpful with her students and might not demonstrate that same level of helpfulness with their normally developing peers. Both educators interpreted this as positive experiences for general education students, as well as, students with disabilities.

A work in progress. The principal noted that their efforts toward a more inclusive philosophy and more inclusive practices were a work in progress. Like recognizing and assessing where they are in their effort, considering themselves a work in progress fosters

an attitude that is consistent with moving forward. Teacher 3 suggested that the special education teachers are considered resources when general education staff needs suggestions about how to approach various teaching issues. She thought that everyone feels comfortable asking questions and asking for help. She referred to the special education teachers as “anyone of us down here” which was indicative of the location of the special education classes in the building. Finally, Teacher 3 suggested that to be included in Peach Mill means that students with disabilities interact with normally developing students without regard to the severity of the disability. When specifying what some of these interactions include, Teacher 3 stated that deciding how students would be integrated into support classes depended on the preferences of the support teachers. While some teachers work with students with disabilities with their age appropriate peers, others use other factors, which include numbers of students and schedules to make class assignments. Though these efforts are in progress, Teacher 3 indicated that she would like to see even more opportunities because she still sees general education teachers reluctant to work with her students because they feel ill prepared to teach students with disabilities.

Teacher 4 suggested that there should be more opportunities available for students with disabilities. She stated that she would like to see more field trip opportunities for her students and more academic activities for the students with disabilities in the lower grades. She stated that she realized that there are budgetary constraints, but her perception is that Peach Mill is trying to move towards a different level of implementation of inclusive practice. While they can allude to some efforts, the principal

and special education teachers are by no means satisfied with the status of their collective philosophy nor the magnitude of their inclusive practices.

The principal responded to Section III and Section IV of the Principal and Inclusion Survey. An examination of attitudes occurs in Section III using principal responses on a Likert Scale. Section IV requires principals to make selections about their perception of the most appropriate placement of students in specific disability categories. This information assists in understanding the direction of Peach Mill's progress since the principal's influence is primary. The principal noted uncertainty about whether student with severe/profound disabilities should be placed in special classes/schools specifically designed for them and uncertainty about whether regular education should be modified to meet the needs of student including students with severe/profound disabilities. This uncertainty was relevant because of the large percentage of students with severe/profound disabilities in Peach Mill. At the same time, she indicated that she strongly disagreed with the statement "No discretionary financial resources should be allocated for the integration of students with severe/profound disabilities." This principal agreed that it should be policy and/or law that students with severe/profound disabilities are integrated into regular educational programs and activities. This survey data provided support for the attitudes that the principal verbalized. Surprisingly, when determining most appropriate placement on Section IV of the survey, the principal indicated that full-time regular education with support was appropriate for students identified as having speech/language impairment, other health impairment, and physical impairment representing suggested

full time placement for 3of 11 disability categories. These responses would tend cause some questions regarding how more inclusive practice will proceed at Peach Mill.

Table 19 displays the behaviors observed during the structured observations that occurred at the school examining the behaviors of the principal and special education teachers during IEP meetings, classroom observations, faculty meeting, and observation of the principal engaged in the normal administrative interactions and routines of the day. At Peach Mill, the special educations were more comfortable with the classroom observations than with the interviews. It should be noted that this observational data does not include an observation of Teacher 5 because he was willing to participate only in a non-taped interview which was recorded and considered as field notes.

Inclusive behaviors observed to at the highest percentage of occurrences in a 90-minute sessions were collaboration with staff, collaboration with students, and participates in IEP meetings. Behaviors that were observed to a medium percentages of occurrences were successes celebrated, verbalizes knowledge of student strengths, and facilitates provisions for resources. Positive inclusive behaviors that were observed at the lowest percentages in 90-minutes sessions were verbalizes commitment ot include students with disabilities, knowledge of differentiated instruction, and observes classroom activities. Because of the nature of the school culture, celebrating successes should be observed from medium to high percentages of observed behaviors which is how these participants ranked.

Table 19

Peach Mill Structured Observation Results for All Participants

Behavior	Percentages of Time for 90-Minute Observation Sessions
Verbalizes commitment to include students with disabilities	0
Knowledge of differentiated curriculum	11
Observes classroom activities	11
Supports necessary accommodations	22
Evaluates the physical plant	22
Facilitates inclusive planning	22
Communicates directly with special education staff	22
Encouraging academic success	22
Successes celebrated	28
Verbalizes knowledge of students' strengths	28
Facilitate provisions for resources	33
Expresses inclusive vision	33
Participates in team planning	39
Communicates with parents	50
Positive interactions with students	67
Positive interactions with staff	67
Collaboration with staff	89
Collaboration with students	89
Participates in IEP Meetings	100

Chapter Summary

Peach Mill Elementary School is an urban school in a metropolitan school district that serves as the hub for the district special education program when considering students with moderate to profound disabilities perceived as appropriate for self-contained settings. Because of this district role given to the school, students with disabilities comprise 36% of the student population. The school administrator suggested that inclusive practice, as she envisions it at Peach Mill, is in the infancy stage. The special education teachers perceived inconsistent growth in ownership taken by stakeholders to see inclusive practice as a viable part of the academic program. This school has new leadership that must redefine and redevelop a sustainable inclusive culture.

Three themes developed for Peach Mill which were conceptualizing a service continuum, need for a paradigm shift, and develop an inclusive culture. The three themes answer the research questions for this single site. These themes indicate that the Peach Mill participants discussed realistic perspectives regarding their current school status related to inclusive practices. They appeared able to analyze changes needed in their academic environment to experience progress in their effort to embrace more inclusive practices. The themes indicated that parent involvement and communication, as well as, analyzing status and progress promises to glean the desired result of improving inclusive practice and changing inclusive philosophies for Peach Mill stakeholders.

CHAPTER 7

CROSS-SITE FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Chapter Introduction

In Chapter 4, Chapter 5, and Chapter 6 each case study site received individual attention to disclose essential details, setting the stage for within-case analyses. The structure of each chapter allowed for the discussion of the context of the school with a rich, thick description to assist readers in understanding the school environment. A within-case analysis occurred at each site and themes were developed that answered the three research questions under investigation for each of the single sites.

This chapter begins with a contextual comparison among the three school sites. Comparisons continue by examining the NCLB data across the sites. Finally, themes from each of the three sites and the context of each site provide the necessary data to answer the research questions by focusing on the similarities and differences among the three schools. These research questions are: (1) How do elementary principals and special education teachers make sense of inclusion and inclusive practices?, (2) How do elementary principals and special education teachers explain inclusive implementation practices in their schools?, and (3) How are espoused beliefs of elementary principals and special education teachers evident in the implementation of inclusive practices in their schools?

Contextual Comparisons

Table 20 presents a summary of the contextual information collected from the three elementary school sites. These schools are as similar as they are different with an unplanned factor of having one urban, one suburban, and one that is characterized as rural/suburban. These schools are within a reasonable range of each other relative to student enrollment, but very different regarding the number of students in the populations receiving free and reduced priced lunches, a nationally accepted indicator of economic disadvantage. Peach Mill Elementary and P. T. Mackley Elementary are located near large metropolitan areas while Mountain View Elementary is in a small city surrounded by other small cities and towns. While Mountain View had the largest student enrollment, the staff reported the smallest per pupil expenditure. In fact, per pupil expenditure increased as the population of each school decreased when comparing the three sites for data collection in this investigation. An examination of data at each school revealed fluctuation in the student populations with similar reasons including building new schools, changing school zones, and construction and changes in residential housing patterns in the school zones.

NCLB Comparisons

Comparisons regarding NCLB subgroups and their performances appear similar for the three school sites. All three schools identified the subgroups of Students with Disabilities, Economically Disadvantaged, and Ethnicity. However, for the 2008 AYP report at P. T. Mackley, the subgroup of Students with Disabilities was not composed of a

Table 20

Cross-Site Comparison

Characteristic	Mountain View	P. T. Mackley	Peach Mill
School Type	Rural/Suburban	Suburban	Urban
Student Enrollment	840	625	595
Per Pupil Expenditure	$6, 241	$8,190	$9,254
% of Students with Disabilities	140	129	212
% of Students with Disabilities	17%	21%	36%
Free/Reduced Priced Lunch	58.1%	31.10%	85%

large enough number of students to represent an NCLB subgroup. The ethnic group of White represented significant subgroups for Mountain View and P. T. Mackley while Peach Mill's ethnic subgroup consisted of African American students. These profiles reflect the composition of the communities in which these schools reside. Using the measure of academic achievement as defined by state criteria, P. T. Mackley demonstrated the greatest achievement with Mountain View placing second and Peach Mill third. However, while Mackley had the greatest achievement, it was third in academic growth when compared to the other two schools with Mountain View and Peach Mill demonstrating sufficient academic growth to rate an "A" in all four core subject areas. Mountain View reported the lowest percentage of students with disabilities who were proficient or advanced in reading/language arts and math, but Peach Mill noted in their School Improvement Plan (2008) that their *Students with Disabilities* status resulted from portfolio assessments, which are alternative assessments for low functioning students.

Research Question 1: How do Elementary Principals and Special Education Teachers Make Sense of Inclusion and Inclusive Practices?

In this section, the first question is examined by integrating the themes from the three school sites that addressed question 1. The common threads that developed across-sites from the within-site data analysis are presented in a manner to address how all participants make sense of inclusion and inclusive practices. Themes that address question 1 are continuum of services, differing viewpoints, a philosophy of inclusion, the importance of social experiences, and consistent uncertainty. In answering the research

questions in this section, principals and special education teachers refers to the participants at all three school sites.

Continuum of Services

Principals and special education teachers described inclusive practices as implementing strategies that allow students with disabilities to participate in the service delivery model that is closest to the general education setting in which the student can be successful. These participants believed that within a school setting, service delivery models are available that begin with full participation in the general education curriculum and move away from the curriculum on a continuum of services toward participation in a special education day school which is the most restrictive academic environment available in many school districts. The three schools described inclusive practice as structured around this continuum of services but the perspectives from the three sites represented different viewpoints regarding where they believed most students in their particular academic environments fell on the continuum. Participants explained the practices that they implement to assist students with disabilities to matriculate successfully through elementary schooling. Participants from the three school sites were able to articulate how they perceived a continuum of services by describing what was in place in their schools. Further, they provided examples relative to specific students to demonstrate how they made programming decisions that they believed provided successful opportunities for students with disabilities. Elementary principals and special education teachers indicated that they believed that they were providing appropriate services within the parameters of the resources that were available to them.

Differing Viewpoints

Figure 8 provides a visual of how the participants at the three school sites focus their student-centered programming decisions regarding inclusion and inclusive practices. The stated focus of the participants at each school site provides insight into the global perspective of their inclusion philosophies. The intersection of the perspectives appear to reflect the length of time the school sites have focused on proactive inclusive practices.

The participants at Mountain View believe that students in the school should receive the maximum amount of services in the general education setting. When they spoke of this maximum, they believed that this was inclusive of academic experiences, as well as, non-academic experiences. The administrators and the special education teachers articulated a commitment to providing a continuum of services that focused on general education as the first option. These participants spoke of appreciating differences.

On the other hand, the P. T. Mackley participants viewed their school as providing a continuum of services on a more global basis because they focused on the inclusive needs of students whether or not disability is an issue. They outlined attempts to maintain a student-centered learning environment that embraced the needs of all students. The administrators indicated that they believe that every student demonstrates unique, individual needs at different times during different instructional activities. The P. T. Mackley participants emphasized using data to make decisions and the administrators shared activity records and schedules and explained how they guided decisions regarding scheduling and assigning co-teaching opportunities. Their long history of inclusive

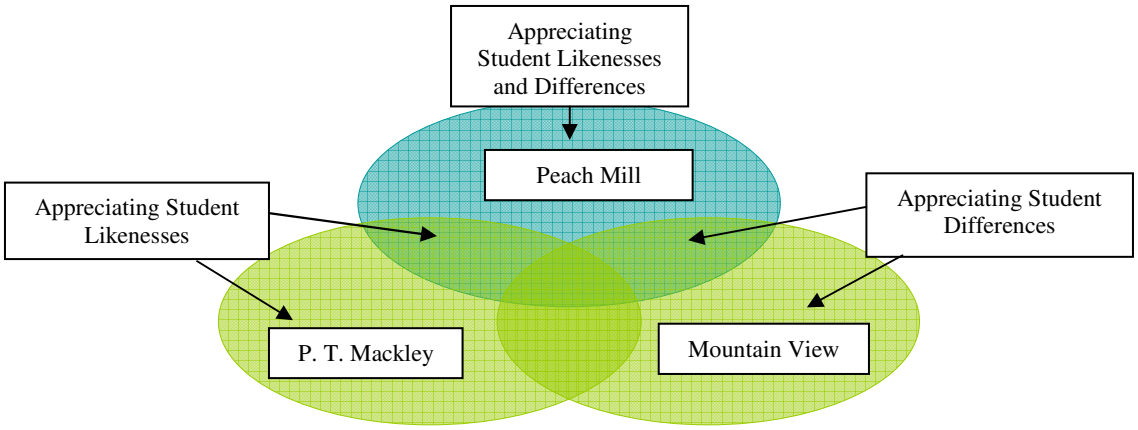

Figure 8. School focus for considering continuum of services

practice was evident in their documentation of the involvement of stakeholders who provided extra resources that directly affected instruction. In contrast to the Mountain View participants, the administrators and special education teachers at P. T. Mackley referred to their focus as appreciating likenesses.

The Peach Mill administrator and special education teachers spoke of providing students with appropriate services. Because of the changes in school leadership, the structure of the special education program, and the school's status, Peach Mill was at the point of developing and embracing a conceptual understanding of inclusion and inclusive practices for articulation by the entire group of stakeholders. The special education teachers and the principal, who has a special education background, expressed a united concept of what they articulated as a model for a continuum of services. The identified participants realized that co-education of students with varying abilities was the focus of inclusive practices. The special education teachers reflected on their classes as well as the classes of their special education colleagues in the school. In most instances, some perceptions revealed cross-sections of concerns in that teachers viewed either positive or negative ideas depending on the delivery model and functioning levels of the students. Surprisingly, the Peach Mill Elementary participants combined the two concepts of differences and likenesses and one teacher summarized it as understanding that we are all different, but in another sense, we are "all the same."

A Philosophy of Inclusion

The elementary principals and special education teachers viewed matriculation in the general education curriculum as a human right of students with disabilities. They

qualified their beliefs with perceptions that indicated that support to make the experience positive for students was critical. A list of priorities to ensure success included teacher support, student support, and parental support. The participants enumerated the components for support as training and both human and material resources. While participants at Mountain View joined the participants from the other two sites in expressing the human rights aspect and demonstrated an appreciation for this aspect, these participants also mentioned the legal requirements of special education law though their greatest motivation appeared to reside in the value aspect of human rights.

Importance of Social Experiences

The elementary principals and special education teachers saw the need to provide an environment that exposed the students to the variety of individuals with their unique needs, talents, and limitations that make up their school populations. Participants saw benefits that nurtured the social and emotional development of all students in the population whether identified as disabled or non-disabled. The underlying rationale was that students must learn to live in a world made of different individuals with differing needs and abilities. Since school is a social environment that represents the larger society, focusing on developing social values that place importance on recognizing and accepting individuality would support enhancing skills needed in post-secondary endeavors. Participants from the school sites did not differ in this overall position, but at least one individual at each site suggested that certain circumstances might indicate that some individual student needs might make limited exposure to the general education curriculum the most appropriate opportunity for particular students. Even in these cases,

the participants suggested that improving supports and intense collaboration to increase general education participation was appropriate in such scenarios.

Consistent Uncertainty

Elementary principals and special education teachers expressed ambivalence regarding how to approach two categories of students regarding implementing inclusive opportunities: students with significant cognitive challenges and students with behavior difficulties. In fact, on the principal survey the least restrictive environment deemed appropriate for students with mental retardation by one administrator was regular education and resource room while the other four administrators perceived more restrictive environments as appropriate. The opinions regarding appropriate placements of students with emotional or behavioral difficulties expressed by administrators were less decisive on the survey, but this issue was mentioned by each administrator interviewed and cautiously qualified with statements that the students' levels of control or class disruptions would provide the data necessary for making decisions that impact the entire learning environment.

Summary

The participants in this study indicated that perceiving students at various levels of exposure to the general curriculum is how they make sense of inclusion. The school sites expressed differing viewpoints that assisted them with their philosophical perspectives regarding how they implement inclusive practices. The Mountain View participants expressed their perspective as recognizing differences while P. T. Mackley participants

indicated that focus on likenesses. On the other hand, the participants from Peach Mill considered likenesses and differences. The participants indicated a belief that students with disabilities have a human right to participate in the general curriculum. Further, the participants saw the relevance of socialization experiences for all students in the school population because of the school's representation of a microcosm of the larger society. All participants indicated that there were uncertainties regarding how to appropriately program for students with mental retardation and students with significant emotional/behavioral difficulties. While the participants expressed definite beliefs about some factors, they acknowledged areas in which they must continue to solidity their positions.

Research Question 2: How do Elementary Principals and Special Education Teachers Explain Inclusive Implementation Practices in Their Schools?

In this section, the ultimate answer to question 2 is discussed by integrating the common findings and analysis taken from the data collection at all three sites. Unless otherwise specified, all references to elementary special education teachers and elementary principals refers to all participants from the three school sites. The themes that developed as answers to how implementation practices are explained at the school sites were, a process of change, collaborative team approach, general education teacher apprehension, and the effect of limited resources. To provide a focused answer to research question 2, a discussion of these themes is warranted.

A Process of Change

Similarities and differences that existed were evident from the data collected at the three sites and these differences focus on the stability or fluidity of change and the change process evident in the specific school setting. The perspective of the participants located at each school site reflected the differences in the maturity of the inclusive implementation process. The administrative commitment articulated by the principals and assistant principals influenced the practices at the school as would be expected. Further, district level influences such as funding policies were issues administrators and special education teachers alluded to when they described some constraints that help define their special education programs.

The special educators and principals at Mountain View spoke of changing practices to improve services for students, but their conversation focused on changing programming within the parameters of what was already available at the school. P. T. Mackley Elementary employed a structure unique to this particular school in this district in which they described their inclusion program and inclusive practices as implementing best practices for all children. This school was designated an inclusion training school and as such extra special education teachers were assigned to the school who were fully certified, but held inclusion intern positions which is how they were titled in this funded inclusion training program though they were fully licensed special education teachers. As specially assigned inclusion interns, these teachers were placed at the school to receive guidance in implementing inclusive practice with the goal of moving them to urban school in the district the following year so they could implement an inclusion program.

This approach created more possibilities for the school and extended the change process beyond the school. The change process presents the greatest challenge at Peach Mill because the district assigned several self-contained classes to the building and students with moderate to profound disabilities from across the district attend these classrooms. The special education population appears as a separate school within Peach Mill because of issues related to schedules, special transportation, and access accommodations.

Interestingly, teachers in special education self-contained settings at Mountain View and P. T. Mackley were satisfied with the inclusive practices implemented in their schools and saw little need for change though the students in these classes participate in non-academic classes for socialization opportunities. While the participants at P. T. Mackley provided information that created the impression that they exposed the lower functioning students to larger percentages of time in the general education classroom, observations at Mountain View appeared to reveal that more students with moderate to severe disabilities experienced more inclusive opportunities in academic settings than at either of the other two sites. In contrast, teachers at Peach Mill who taught self-contained classes were not satisfied with the level of inclusive opportunities afforded their students.

Special education teachers in resource settings were less satisfied with the opportunities available for students with mild disabilities. Teachers at Mountain View and P. T. Mackley had similar concerns regarding a need to increase the amount of time they spend in the classes where they co-teach. The resource teacher at Peach Mill yearned for enough special education teachers on staff to go into general education classrooms and co-teach to decrease pullout classes and increase the number of students with

disabilities that remain in the classroom for academic instruction in the general education curriculum. All participants understood that change is difficult for many reasons: some of which they can control and some for which they must attempt to compensate.

Collaborative Team Approach

The elementary principals and special education teachers discussed the importance of a collaborative team approach. The universal response across the settings was "I am a member of the team" when the role as a participant on the IEP team and the impact on programming was discussed. The principal at Mountain View was the only administrator who verbalized that she tries to bring the team to her way of thinking if there is some disagreement regarding programming, but she explained her actions by stating that sometimes she is the only one who has observed a specific student's development over time. Teachers tended to see the collaborative team members as limited within the structure of the building including parents as a part of that structure. Administrators tended to consider the perspective of the stakeholder group involving district supervisors, community, parents, businesses, and building administrators to name a few.

General Education Teacher Apprehension

Elementary principals and special education teachers spoke of apprehension of the general education teachers to work with students with disabilities. The principal at Mountain View addresses this issue by placing one teacher who is skilled and willing to teach students with specifically different learning needs at every grade level. She characterized this as selecting teachers with skills in differentiated instruction. The principal at P. T. Mackley stated that she uses student performance data to support the

positive effects of academic inclusion. Her approach includes showing the general education teachers what benefits are available for them by accepting co-teaching classroom support. She believes that an attitude change occurred over time though there are still some issues. However, the special education teachers at P. T. Mackley indicated that there are still apprehensive general education teachers in the school. Peach Mill's principal attributed apprehension to the fact that this is and will continue to represent a shift from implementation practices in the past at the school and implementing new practices is in the early stages of change.

The principals attributed teacher apprehension to a lack of teacher training and teachers feeling uncomfortable with their ability to properly instruct students with disabilities. These principals described ways they attempt to facilitate teacher training. Mountain View and P. T. Mackley principals articulated more formal training implemented at the school level than did Peach Mill. The principal at Mountain View explained how she has developed a reference library of professional readings that includes many research articles on characteristics of specific disability categories. P. T. Mackley's principal emphasized how she uses her special education teachers as teacher leaders in that she sends them to trainings and requires them to disseminate the training materials to the general education teachers. She indicated that she believes this has helped her special education teachers to be perceived as experts. As a result, they have more credibility with their general education colleagues. The principal at Peach Mill spoke of cross training general education and special education teachers, but at this point, this effort has involved only those trainings that are routinely available at the district level.

While the principals focused on formal training, special education teachers placed their focus on building relationships and developing familiarity with their students as an effort to combat apprehension. These teachers, also, emphasized engaging in professional dialogue with general education teachers to discuss materials and strategies that are sound instructional approaches for students. The special education teachers at Mountain View voiced the greatest affirmation, regarding the influence of administrative commitment on teacher attitudes and apprehension. They indicated that they see a high level of commitment to inclusive practice in the conversation and actions of their principal.

Effect of Limited Resources

Elementary principals and special education teachers noted the lack of resources as a factor that modifies the implementation of inclusive practices. Strikingly, the participants were more concerned with human resources than with materials though materials were a resource issue as well. Participants spoke of what they could and would implement if they had more special education staff. All participants at Mountain View and Peach Mill spoke of increasing the number of special education teachers in their buildings so they could increase the number of co-taught classes. Co-taught classes are classes in which a general education teacher and a special education teacher deliver the general education curriculum together to a heterogeneous group of students with significantly different learning needs: some students with disabilities and some normally developing students. Since P. T. Mackley had its inclusion internship program, the number of special education resource teachers in the school was unusually high. However, these special education teachers perceived their assignments were structured with an insufficient

amount of instructional time for each group they taught causing them to believe their impact could be more significant with a modified schedule. It is important to note that later during the spring semester the inclusion intern program implemented at P. T. Mackley was cut from the district budget and would not receive funds for continuation during the 2008-2009 school year (Special Education Director, personal communication, May 16, 2008). This will significantly reduce the number of special education teachers assigned to the school.

Summary

The participants in this study provided data that assisted with the development of themes that answered the second research question. Implementation practices in the elementary schools in this study were significantly influenced by a process of change. The stability of this change was influenced by the level of maturity of the inclusion implementation process in the particular school. Making decisions regarding changes in individual or school-wide change was the task of the collaborative team and all participants in the schools voiced the importance of the team process. Within the process the participants from the schools indicated that they continue to face apprehension from general education teachers without regard to how long inclusive practice has been the focus of the school. Each school saw the value and need for stakeholder training as necessary to address apprehension of all involved individuals. The participants from the three sites were aware of the effect of limited resources, whether human or material, on the implementation of inclusive practices though all participants were more interested in human resources. Within the schools, all participants viewed co-taught classes as a

method of enhancing their ability to provide adequate, meaningful access to the general education classroom for students with disabilities.

Research Question 3: How are Espoused Beliefs of Elementary Principals and Special Education Teachers Evident in the Implementation of Inclusive Practices in Their Schools?

The evidence regarding question 3 rests upon examining interview comments of special education teachers and principals and survey responses of principals to compare them with observed behaviors of the participants in the school along with information noted in documents. The quest is to look for behaviors of special education teachers and principals in the that are congruent or incongruent with espoused beliefs. Exploring this question presents the potential for determining implications for future proactive efforts in the field of education regarding this timeless topic of inclusive education especially related to including students with disabilities.

Using all data collected from the available sources at the three school sites, three themes were developed that answer the question 3. The themes that address the third and final research question are perceptions and practices, impact of district initiatives, subtle nuances, and inclusion initiatives. These themes were developed by integrating the themes from all three sites and examining common analysis and findings. References to principals and special education teachers includes the participants from all three sites unless otherwise specified.

Perceptions and Practices

A comparison of perceptions and practices is possible through examining what participants have expressed in interviews, what has been obtained in field notes and documents, and what was observed in structured observation. Looking at perceptions and practices addresses the idea of congruence or incongruence of what has been expressed in research questions 1 and research question 2 relative to what was seen during observations.

Table 21 shows the results of the structured observational data gathered from each school site. Comparisons of similarities and differences among the three schools allow readers to look at espoused beliefs and implementation of inclusive practices in the schools. Data in the table represent the percentage of time inclusive behaviors were observed in 90-minute observation sessions. These sessions were divided into 5-minute segments using partial interval recording to document which specific behaviors were present or absent. The numbers represent combined observational data for all participants at each school site. The data for special education teachers and principals were combined. The chart provides a means of making some descriptive comparisons among the three schools.

The structured observations at the three school sites yielded some trends worthy of discussion. The highest percentage of observed behavior for elementary principals and special education teachers was participating in IEP meetings. The observed behaviors

Table 21

Comparative Table of Observed Inclusive Behaviors of All Participants

Behaviors	% of Time for 90-Minute Observation Sessions Mountain View	P. T. Mackley	Peach Mill
Positive interaction with students	67	100	67
Positive interaction with staff	72	94	67
Communication with parents	78	100	50
Facilitate provisions for resources	28	56	33
Successes celebrated	11	28	28
Collaboration with staff	78	83	89
Collaboration with students	61	78	33
Supports necessary accommodations	67	78	22
Evaluates the physical plant	39	6	22
Expresses inclusive vision	6	44	33
Knowledge of differentiated curriculum	39	28	11
Facilitates inclusive planning	0	61	22
Verbalizes knowledge of students' strengths	56	44	28
Verbalizes a commitment to include students with disabilities	6	6	0
Participates in team planning	22	0	39
Participates in IEP Meetings	89	100	100
Observes classroom activities	33	61	11
Communicates directly with special education staff	17	6	22
Encouraging academic success	28	94	22

were significantly different for administrators than for special education teachers, which was obvious when administrator and teacher behaviors were disaggregated. It is worthy to note that at Mountain View and at P. T. Mackley, administrators left the IEP team meeting after the first 45 minutes of the 90-minute observation session. However, at Peach Mill, a district-level administrator was present, but the building-level administrators did not participate. However, during unstructured observations, administrators at Peach Mill were present in other IEP meetings. Another observed behavior that was high for P. T. Mackley and Mountain View participants was communication with parents. For Peach Mill additional observed behaviors that were high were collaboration with students and collaboration with staff. For whatever the reason, verbalizing a commitment to include students with disabilities was observed at a low percentage for all three sites. The median behavior observed at the three sites were as follows: Mountain View evaluating the physical plant (39%), P. T. Mackley facilitating inclusive planning (61%), and Peach Mill facilitates provisions for resources (33%). The overall trends of the structured observations indicated that P. T. Mackley demonstrated the highest percentages of observed inclusive behaviors in that the median of the calculated percentages for inclusive behaviors was higher than the other two school sites. Mountain View rated second in demonstrating observed inclusive behaviors while Peach Mill was third. These data appear to reflect a hierarchy related to length of time schools have actively focused on increasing inclusive practice. At the same time, the behavior observed at the lowest rate, verbalizing a commitment to include students with

disabilities, indicates some incongruence between what was espoused by participants and what was observed at all three sites.

Issues related to physical space surfaced during these visits. At the Peach Mill and P. T. Mackley sites, there was a physical separation of the self-contained classrooms. Though this portrays a division between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers, both of these situations were influenced by district level initiatives. At Peach Mill, the district expended funds to install elevators to make the building accessible and P. T. Mackley's district added a CDC classroom wing onto the building that was equipped with the necessary items to teach daily living and self-help skills. In both cases, the facilities were designated as sites to receive students with disabilities from other school zones in the district. These students are children with significant disabling conditions. While this might be an economically sound decision, it has the potential for creating more separation between populations of students than is conducive to inclusive practice. Conversely, while parents of students with disabilities select Mountain View in a district where open enrollment is a policy, there is not an apparent difference in the physical placement or number of students in self-contained classrooms at the school.

Subtle Nuances

Some subtle nuances were observed which were evident at the school sites. A consistently observed occurrence at all three sites was the practice of placing students in the self-contained special education classes at separate tables from their normally developing peers during lunchtime. When participants spoke of including the students at lunch, they referred to classes being in the cafeteria at the same time, but students were at

segregated tables. This probably resulted from the fact that self-contained classes were treated as separate homerooms. One participant at Peach Mill reflected on the fact that this had not been the case the previous year. While self-contained classrooms were separate classrooms, they sat at tables with their non-disabled peers during the 2006-2007 school year. This change, which she described as an example of inconsistent progress, occurred during the 2007-2008 school year when the tables in the cafeteria were rearranged. The fact that she mentioned this indicated that she saw it as a less than acceptable practice. At Mountain View, a photo album available for public perusal provided a group photo and labeled the self-contained classroom as such. While this might indicate their position of appreciating differences, it is likely a privacy violation and might have the effect of creating an attitude of separation.

Inclusion Initiatives

Elementary principals and special education teachers described co-teaching initiatives in place in their schools as a way to diminish the number of students receiving pullout special education services. The goal of these initiatives was to increase the exposure of students with disabilities to the general education curriculum. The success of these efforts has targeted higher functioning students with lower functioning students receiving exposure through non-academic activities. P. T. Mackley espoused and demonstrated the highest level of inclusive practice through co-taught classes, but at the same time, Mountain View demonstrated the highest level of opportunities available for students with moderate to severe disabilities. While there are arguments regarding these practices,

the opportunities provided do support the philosophy of a continuum of services that each school site participants espoused.

There were notable differences in what teachers expressed as desired initiatives when discussing co-teaching and other ways to including their students. At Peach Mill, the teachers of self-contained classes desired more academic and non-academic inclusion for their students. Teachers providing this level of service at Mountain View and P. T. Mackley voiced satisfaction with services provided for their students though the P. T. Mackley staff appeared to focus primarily on non-academic participation. However, Peach Mill and Mountain View resource teachers believed that more opportunities that are academic should be available for students they serve while the resource teachers at P. T. Mackley indicated that some students in inclusive settings needed pullout instruction.

Summary

Question 3 considered whether participants in the three school sites practiced the beliefs that they espoused. Data from the structured observations indicated that the participants at the three school sites did not, to a large degree, verbalize a commitment to include students with disabilities during observations. Participants at the two sites that were more suburban displayed higher frequencies of communication with parents while participants from the urban setting demonstrated more communication with students. Elementary principals and special education teachers at all three sites described district level initiatives that impact their implementation efforts with regard to inclusive practices and they failed to indicate any proactive efforts to influence district decisions to enhance success. Subtle nuances occurred at the three school sites that would indicate a need for

examination by the school stakeholders to interpret the impact of such nuances on practice or as a reflection of attitudes. The research participants suggested that increasing co-taught classes was an effective means of increasing appropriate participation in the general education curriculum, but they perceived this initiative as requiring additional special education personnel.

Chapter Summary

Elementary principals and special education teachers described through conversation and their actions how inclusion and inclusive practices play out in their schools. The participants at Mountain View and P. T. Mackley have a proactive history that spans several years. Inclusive practices appeared more stable at P. T. Mackley, but Mountain View appeared more comfortable including students with more significant disabilities though participants expressed this as an area of concern. The Peach Mill special education teachers and the principal considered their program in its infancy having been influenced both positively and negatively by the change in the administrative leadership in the school. With these different perspectives at the three sites, all participants articulated providing a continuum of services with inclusive practices in place to support maximizing opportunities in academic and non-academic school settings.

Elementary principals and special education teachers recognized that change has occurred in special education services in their schools. They believe that making student-centered decisions necessitates remaining flexible so changing needs and circumstances are addressed. These educators implement a collaborative team approach to ensure that

various perspectives are included in decision-making. Elementary principals and special education teachers also assess and address the influence of limited resources and general education teacher apprehension when they focus on needed changes in their program delivery.

The participants at all three sites described utilizing co-teaching as an inclusive strategy to facilitate more academic inclusion experiences. These participants saw a need to monitor and adjust the manner in which they have implemented this practice. The special education teachers at P. T. Mackley and Mountain View recognized the influence of principal leadership. This was not articulated as much at Peach Mill and this is not unexpected in a setting where the principal was assigned the position for the spring semester of the academic year of 2007-2008. However, the behavior observed at low levels during structured observations of the participants was articulating a commitment to include students with disabilities. While there were similarities and differences among the sites, none of the sites mentioned abandoning their efforts and believe that access to the general education curriculum to the extent appropriate was a human right as much as a legal right.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Conclusions

The investigation started out with the intent to answer three research questions: (1) How do elementary principals and special education teachers make sense of inclusion and inclusive practices?, (2) How do elementary principals and special education teachers explain inclusive implementation practices in their schools?, and (3) How are espoused beliefs of elementary principals and special education teachers evident in the implementation of inclusive practices in their schools? Data were triangulated from interviews, observations, a principal survey, and documents from the sites to develop themes. A cross-site analysis which involved a comparison of similarities and differences among school sites was used to ultimately answer the three research questions. Conclusions about the findings were interpreted and considered from the lens of Theories-of-Action (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

Argyris and Schön (1974) suggested that the behavior of individuals represent two theories. Espoused theory is what people say, but their real theory is defined by what they do: theory-in-use. These theorists indicated that individuals often are unaware when there is incongruence between what they say and what they do. Human behavior is complex and our basic instinct that has been established since early life is to function within a certain range of behaviors that are governed by our values. We utilize certain strategies to manage our immediate environment with the intention of maintaining important beliefs.

Action strategies enacted produce consequences for self and consequences for others and as such individuals attempt to control their environments.

Elementary principals and special education teachers in this study indicated that inclusion means providing opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in the general education curriculum for academic and non-academic activities. They consistently expressed a caveat which allows them latitude: "to the extent that is appropriate." The latitude established is controlled by a verbal strategy. By expressing this, participants established the means by which they can protect their governing values because they can maintain control over what they consider appropriate participation in the academic environment. Most participants spoke indirectly about how they attempt to influence the decisions of the Individual Educational Program team, but one individual was direct about stating that she utilized strategies to influence the team to her manner of thinking when she disagrees with the team decisions. However, it is likely that everyone interviewed uses strategies that they implement in an attempt to keep team decisions in the range of their governing values. The lens of Theories-of-Action (Argyris & Schön, 1974) would indicate that team members do not loose their individuality relative to their governing values. Thus, it is likely that group members strive to manage group decisions whether or not they verbalize these strategies.

What should be noted is that these participants expressed understandings of inclusion that presented it as a philosophy. While they did not directly indicate that inclusion is a philosophy, their expressions of social acceptance, human rights, human value, and equality of opportunities are philosophical perspectives upon which they stated their

practices are built. Doyle (2001) found that administrators saw inclusion as another place on the continuum of services. However, administrator participants in this study verbalized philosophical perspectives. By seeing inclusion as another place on a continuum of services, educators in the Doyle study indicated that there is a detachment from ethical and moral values; however, participants in this study made those ethical connections.

Since special education teachers in self-contained settings at P. T. Mackley and Mountain View believed that their students were in appropriate inclusive settings, it might be concluded that these teachers elected to teach in delivery models that they perceived as being most appropriate or they adopted espoused beliefs that support their current teaching assignments. The teachers of self-contained classes at Peach Mill believed that their students should have more inclusive opportunities. They espoused beliefs that were not in place in their schools, but they also described action strategies that would produce an academic setting that would fall within the range of their value systems.

The major strategy that special education teachers at the three school sites discussed focused on establishing positive and more familiar relationships with stakeholders that would have key roles in establishing more inclusive practices in their school. By being proactive with these strategies, the special education teachers at Peach Mill Elementary would enhance the possibility of moving practices within acceptable ranges of their governing values. By pinpointing the target group of general education teachers to

influence, special education teachers can manage consequences for others and thereby gain positive consequences for themselves.

When participants explained how they made sense of the concept of inclusion and inclusive practices, one of their focuses was on the human rights of students to be involved in the school environment. This supported the work of researchers who found that successful inclusive schools are under the direction of educators who believe in the intrinsic value of human beings (Bargerhuff, 2002; Keyes et al., 1999; Kugelmass, 2003; Olson et al., 1997; Salisbury & McGregor, 2002). While special education law was mentioned during some discussions, participants spoke more passionately about the rights of students as human beings. This appeared to be a governing value espoused by most of the participants. Overall, the sites focused on appreciating likenesses, appreciating differences, or a combination of appreciating likenesses and differences. Participants at P. T. Mackley used their focus on likenesses to support their global perspective that all students have needs at particular times in the learning process. In contrast, Mountain View indicated that differences must be acknowledged and addressed in the most appropriate format leading them to place more of a focus on meeting individual needs of every student while recognizing that some have more significant needs. Peach Mill staff spoke of recognizing likenesses and differences. While this might be indicative of a more holistic view of students, it could easily be argued that these participants have not solidified their belief system because they are in process of shifting paradigms.

When participants at the sites explained inclusive practices in their schools, one issue that constrained their programs was related to system-wide resources. These resources

related to funds and how they were used to meet federal, state, and local guidelines. The district in which Peach Mill is located might make the argument that having several classes in one school would eliminate putting students in a special day school, but it would not address the optimum situation of placing classes in zoned schools. Likewise, participants at P. T. Mackley had a self-contained classroom constructed at their school that was a district initiative serving low functioning students from schools in other zones. None of the participants articulated any beliefs that this created a district mandate that concentrated low functioning students in specific areas of the school and areas of the district. It is noteworthy that no participant questioned the wisdom of their school district regarding these practices. This might be explained by an earlier observation that ideas regarding change appeared to be confined to building-level parameters. One could suppose that participants evaluated voicing disagreement with district practice in terms of what consequences might result for them if they questioned district initiatives.

The pace of the implementation process was significant. More advanced practices were in place at P. T. Mackley Elementary, the school that had a concentrated focus on inclusive practices as a part of the school culture for a span of 11 to 12 years. Though some special education teachers questioned whether or not some aspects of the program provided maximum growth potential for certain students, those teachers did not indicate that they had shared their perceptions and concerns with the school administration. This would raise questions regarding whether or not the special education teachers were functioning within or outside of their acceptable range of governing values. The staff at P. T. Mackley's has established a stable implementation process when compared to

Mountain View Elementary participant's 6 year initiative. Though the articulated focus of the participants was specific to students with disabilities, their belief statements, slogans, and general school culture demonstrated that the focus was on all students as well. The infancy stage was expressed by Peach Mill's participants and these individuals emphasized the fluctuation in their administrative leadership and the inconsistency in the implementation process. This leads to the conclusion that the stability of administrative leadership is important until the culture is embraced by all stakeholders. At this point, the culture would shape any future leaders' behaviors because their action strategies would be influenced by the consequences engendered in other stakeholders. This would be particularly true for administrators new to a district or school because they would get clear messages about the practices deemed important in the school culture. The result would involve stabilizing progress already made in the area of inclusive practice.

Emphasizing the importance of enhancing social and emotional development of students with disabilities was espoused by elementary principals and special education teachers. This espoused belief functions within the range of governing values described by participants that supports a continuum of services utilized as a part of inclusive practices. By making social/emotional goals as important as academic, the justification can be made for making decisions to restrict some students to non-academic activities. This conclusion is not an indication that this mindset is erroneous. It is merely a view through the theoretical framework upon which this investigation was based. The social and emotional development of all students contributes to developing them into citizens

capable to contributing to a democratic society. However, it should not be relied upon as a justification for limiting student participation in a variety of school opportunities.

When examining the question related to how espoused beliefs are evident in the school, there are conclusions that can be drawn from the research data. The data tabulated from the structured observations indicated that verbalizing a commitment to include students with disabilities was observed by the participants at a low rate when 90-minute observation segments were expressed as percentages of observed inclusive behaviors. According to the structured observation, all three sites expressed a commitment to include students with disabilities 6% of the time during 90-minute observation segments. Stakeholders need to hear that commitment as a direct statement in addition to inferring it from what they see in action. This is important for Mountain View and Peach Mill because inclusive practices are not as well established as P. T. Mackley. Consideration must be given to the fact that these data were produced by one observer.

Elementary principals' and special education teachers' program activities centered around basic philosophies that were influenced by where they were in the implementation process. Participants at Mountain View focused on strategies in place that supports the implementation of their program. They evaluated where they were as a school and where they were with individual students. P. T. Mackley's participants focused on reflecting on the evolution of their program over time while participants at Peach Mill were at the early point of developing an inclusive school culture. Continuing this quest within these schools depends on the leadership of the school through the principals as the administrators and teacher leaders which might include special education and general

education teachers. These leaders have espoused politically correct perspectives and noted proactive strategies to accomplish increasing inclusive practices and promoting acceptance of a positive philosophy of inclusion. However, none of the participants themselves noted what the consequences were for stakeholders at the building level who did not share their beliefs. A special education teacher at Mountain View did indicate that the principal at Mountain View did not retain teachers that espoused and enacted different beliefs if they were out of her range of acceptable governing values. While it can not be concluded that the principals at the other sites did not make similar choices, they did not mention this action as an option that they exercised.

Implications for Research and Practice

Implications are indicated based on the conclusions discussed in the Chapter 7. These implications present the potential for making suggestions that could impact future educational practices and research related to inclusion and inclusive practices. Readers are reminded that conclusions and implications are based on the data collected at three elementary schools in the southeastern United States. The implications are specific to those sites, but they do support finding of other empirical studies in the literature cited earlier in Chapter 2, even though there is a dearth of research in this area.

The first implication is the importance of ensuring that general education teachers and special education teachers receive sufficient training to give them the tools to clarify their understanding of inclusion and inclusive practices. By clarifying their understanding, general education and special education teachers could examine their knowledge, attitudes, and dispositions in an effort to determine whether their espoused beliefs are

congruent with their actions. Having this information fosters change when circumstances indicate a need for such an action is necessary to benefit students and the learning environment. This perspective was suggested in the work of earlier educational researchers (Cook et al., 1999; Praisner, 2003).

The second implication focuses on district level support. Educators at the central office level must communicate a clear and direct philosophy about inclusion that they express to the community. The importance of this involves understanding the impact on schools when individuals placed as the building-level administrator in particular schools are changed frequently. Instability in principal leadership can suppress progress toward maximum inclusive education in a school. If new administrators realize that inclusion and inclusive practices are system priorities, then the likelihood of inconsistent implementation related to changes in administration lessens. At the same time when budget priorities are considered in inclusive school systems, those inclusive practices that enhance what individual schools and systems are able to implement are funded.

The importance of yearly statistical special education status reports represents a third implication. When schools are able to look at disaggregated data that show yearly trends relating to the number of hours students with disabilities spend in the general education curriculum, schools and districts become more capable of determining if they are increasing the time, fluctuating back and forth, or decreasing the time. It is important to look at hard data related to hours spent in the general education curriculum because these data provide profiles that could indicate less time provided students with disabilities than subjective impressions might present. Certainly, the hours will fluctuate to a certain

extent because of the individualization of programs, but districts should look for trends of their overall behavior by schools and as a district. Additionally, schools should examine academic and social gains in systematic ways to look as quality of instruction and appropriateness of placements in various special education service models. This assists schools and districts with making data-driven decisions regarding district and school goals related to inclusive practices. This information might lead more schools to develop belief statement and school improvement goals that include direct attention to serving students with disabilities.

Finally, data collected in this study imply that starting with examining personal beliefs and values about inclusion and determining the level of commitment of stakeholders offers potential for increasing the pace of the slow implementation process. The participants offered valid reasons for slow implementation which was the notion that slow implementation increases establishing practices that are sustainable. However, separating the philosophy of inclusion as a governing value and working from the perspective of action strategies needed to implement inclusive practices provides a comprehensible path for increasing the pace of implementation. Stakeholders who declare a strong inclusion philosophy are able to place inclusive practices at a higher priority than individuals who are ambivalent about this matter.

There remains a significant need to add to the knowledge base regarding this phenomenon of congruence or incongruence between espoused theories and theories-in-use when examining philosophies of inclusion and implementation of inclusive practices. It would be valuable to continue to follow Peach Mill Elementary School because of the

"infancy" label the participants used to describe their program in relation to inclusion and inclusive practices. A case study that spans several years and includes general education and special education participants, along with the administrators assigned to the building, would provide invaluable data to use in continuing this area of study.

Additionally, some survey research that enlarges on the concept of comparing what stakeholders express as a philosophy about inclusion and what placement decisions they make would provide valuable information. This type of survey data would allow additional examination of applying Theories-of-Action (Argyris & Schon, 1974) to look at congruence and incongruence in what educators say and what they do regarding inclusion and inclusive practice. Survey research to assess this would require developing an instrument that would produce comparison data for participants. Such a survey would add a tool that could be utilized to assist stakeholders in defining what issues are suppressing their efforts. Not only do students with disabilities have the human right to participate in the general curriculum, educators have the responsibility of transforming schools to caring and inclusive environments that assist all students to develop into caring, contributors to a democratic society.

Another area of research that has the potential for adding to the knowledge base of this study would involve comparing the perspectives of principals with special education backgrounds and principals with little or no special education experience. While there were only five administrators who were participants in this study, all of the administrator participants indicated on the sections of the Principal and Inclusion Survey they completed that students labeled mentally retarded should be in more restrictive

educational environments than students in other disability categories. Since principals set the tone for an inclusive school culture, additional data in this area could add to the body of knowledge that supports that concept that educators should receive more training in the areas of understanding special education and the characteristics of disabilities categories.

Finally, research that uses district level stakeholders would build upon this study because participants provided data that showed the influence of district initiatives on inclusive practices at the building level. District administrators control budget and funding and their decisions (action strategies) are influenced by their governing values. These data would add information regarding the importance of understanding and influencing stakeholder perspectives in a hierarchical manner to strengthen implementation practices. Further, this information would inform educational researcher about one component necessary for improving the pace of implementation.

Lessons Learned for Practice

Encouraging stakeholders to confront their hypocrisies is a difficult but needed endeavor. Human beings are strongly controlled by their governing values whether they openly recognize it or not. The first response to challenges regarding the practices implemented at schools is defensiveness. Confronting incongruence regarding practices and beliefs is difficult even if the process will improve practice. There are practices that potentially will address these issues in ways that are indirect, but will yield changes in perspectives and foster positive outcomes.

Inclusive practices can increase in schools when stakeholders establish more familiar relationships with students with disabilities and have positive experiences in inclusive settings. The pacing and consistency of the implementation process was significant which raised a question as to whether or not special education teachers were working in settings that were outside of their range of governing values depending more so on their school assignments than other factors. Encouraging building administrators to engage in open dialogue with potential hires regarding their philosophies and prior practices in classrooms would encourage potential candidates to examine their values in light of the school building for which they are seeking employment. Also, espousing the importance of social/emotional development could serve as a means of promoting or reconciling teacher ambivalence regarding how lower functioning students are instructed. Establishing a practice of verbalizing a commitment to including students with disabilities in academic and non-academic instruction to the maximum extent possible communicates an expectation for potential new hires to consider.

The research questions that set the stage for this research study provided an important inquiry regarding inclusion and inclusive practice in public schools. Unlike many studies, these questions were structured to address the quintain related to congruence or incongruence between espoused theory and theory-in-use. By examining human behavior in relation to this phenomenon, the examination goes beyond a singular examination of personal perceptions. The education of students, whether identified with disabilities under IDEA 2004 or non-disabled students, relies on stakeholder decisions and actions. This study widens the knowledge base that addresses the perceptions and understanding of

inclusion and inclusive practices as expressed by key stakeholders who took part in this study. This researcher encourages other educational researchers to continue to explore this area of interest to inform knowledge, skills, and practice.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Data Collection Procedures and Schedule

Adherence to this schedule will occur to the extent that the schools' scheduled activities allow. Modifications will occur on day one with input from the participants. School _____

Day of the Week	Time of Activity	Description of Activity
Day 1 Monday Date: _____	8:00am - 8:30am 8:30am - 10:00am 10:00am - 11:00am 11:00 am -12:00pm 12:00pm - 1:00pm 1:00pm - 2:30pm 2:30pm - 3:00pm	Meet with study participants, get permissions signed, give PIS **Structured observation of Special Education Teacher 1** **Structured Observation Administrator** Lunch at School (Field Notes from unstructured observation) Gather documents **Semi-structured interview of Special Education Teacher 1** Organize data and plan for day 2
Day 2 Tuesday Date: _____	8:00am - 8:30am 8:30am - 10:00am 10:00am -11:00am 11:00 am -12:30pm 12:00pm - 1:00pm 1:00pm - 2:30pm 2:30pm - 3:00pm	Walk school campus / observe in unstructured manner/get PIS **Structured observation of Special Education Teacher 2** Note physical facility/ location of special education classes **Semi-structured interview with Administrator** Lunch at School (Fields Notes from unstructured observation) **Semi-structured interview of Special Education Teacher 2** Organize data and plan for day 3
Day 3 Wednesday Date: _____	8:00am - 8:30am 8:30am - 10:00am 10:00am - 11:00am 11:00 am -12:00pm 12:00pm -1:00pm 1:00pm - 2:00pm 2:00pm - 3:00pm	Walk school campus and observe in unstructured manner **Structured observation of Special Education Teacher 3** **Observation Administrator 2 (if necessary)/Record Field Notes** Lunch at School (Fields Notes from unstructured observation) Examination of documents (Special Education Building Level Report/School Improvement Plan **Semi-structured interview of Special Education Teacher 3**
Day 4 – Thursday Date: _____	8:00am - 8:30am 8:30am - 10:00am 10:00am - 11:00am 11:00am -12:00pm 12:00pm - 1:00pm 1:00pm - 2:30pm 2:30pm - 3:00pm	Field Notes (Observe bus arrivals)/Talk with duty staff Continue study and examination of documents Make-up any missed activities Lunch at School (Fields Notes from unstructured observation) **Semi-structured Interview with Administrator 2 (if necessary)** **Structured observation of Special Education Teacher 4** Informal observations/Field Notes
Day 5 – Friday Friday Date: _____	8:00am - 8:30am 8:30am - 10:00am 11:00am - 12:00pm 12:00pm - 1:00pm 1:00pm - 2:00pm 2:00pm - 3:00pm	Observe in breakfast room/ Talk to duty staff **Semi-structured interview of Special Education Teacher 4** **Second structured observation of Administrator 1** Make up for any missed observations/interviews Lunch at School (Field Notes from unstructured observation) **Second structured observation of Administrator 2** Exit interview with participants to clarify any issues

Note: Structured observations will occur during IEP team meetings whenever possible. Otherwise, they will occur during class time for teachers or shadowing with administrators.

Appendix B

Administrator Interview Protocol

Name: _____ Gender: _____

Years of Full Time Regular Ed. Teaching Experience _____

Years of Full Time Special Ed. Teaching Experience _____

Years as elementary Principal _____ Years in current school _____

Approximate number of special education *credits* in your formal training: _____

Approximate number of in-service training *hours* in inclusive practices: _____

1. Describe how you are involved in special education programming decisions in your school.

2. How do you prepare teachers to respond to the needs of students with disabilities?

3. What do you do when you disagree with programming decisions made by the IEP team?

4. What do you do when regular education teachers express doubts about teaching disabled students in their classrooms?

5. What feedback have you received from your faculty regarding inclusion experiences? Discuss an action you have taken based on faculty feedback.

6. What notable experiences have you encountered with parents of students with disabilities?

7. Suppose the parent of a non-disabled child told you that including students with disabilities was infringing upon the right of his/her child. How would you respond?

8. How do you define the inclusion of students with disabilities?

9. In your opinion, what are the benefits of inclusion?

10. In your opinion, what are the disadvantages of inclusion?

11. What does it mean to be included in your school?

12. Describe the typical day of a student with special needs in this building.

13. What additional thoughts would you like to share that we have not discussed?

Appendix C

Special Education Teacher Interview Protocol

Name: _____ Gender: _____

Do you have any experience as a Regular Ed. Teacher? ___ If yes, how many years? _____

Years of Full Time Special Ed. Teaching Experience _____

Years in current school _____

Current position: Resource? _____ Self-contained? ____ Itinerant? _____

Approximate number of in-service training *hours* in inclusive practices: _____

1. Describe how you are involved in special education programming decisions in your school.

2. How do you assist regular teachers in responding to the needs of students with disabilities?

3. What do you do when there are disagreements with programming decisions made by the IEP team?

4. What do you do when regular education teachers express doubts about teaching disabled students in their classrooms?

5. What feedback have you received from your colleagues regarding inclusion experiences?
   Discuss an action you have taken based on feedback from your colleagues.

6. What notable experiences have you encountered with parents of students with disabilities?

7. Suppose the parent of a non-disabled child told you that including students with disabilities was infringing upon the right of his/her child. How would you respond?

8. How would you define the inclusion of students with disabilities?

9. In your opinion, what are the benefits of inclusion?

10. In your opinion, what are the disadvantages of inclusion?

Appendix C, continued

11. What does it mean to be included in *this* school?

12. Describe the typical day of a student with special needs in this building.

13. What additional thoughts would you like to share that we have not discussed?

14. If you could design an ideal special education inclusion program in this school, what would it look like?

Appendix D

Structured Observation Protocol

<u>Directions</u>: Please observe the participant in five minute intervals. During that interval place a + for any of the followings behaviors observed related to implementing an inclusive environment.

Behaviors	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	85	90
Positive interaction with students																		
Positive interaction with staff																		
Communication with parents																		
Facilitate provisions for resources																		
Successes celebrated																		
Collaboration with staff																		
Collaboration with students																		
Supports necessary accommodations																		
Evaluates the physical plant																		
Expresses inclusive vision																		
Knowledge of differentiated curriculum																		
Facilitates inclusive planning																		
Verbalizes knowledge of students strengths																		
Verbalizes commitment to include students with disabilities																		
Participates in team planning																		
Participates in IEP meeting																		
Observes classrooms activities																		
Communicates directly with special education staff																		
Encouraging academic success																		

Observation Notes:

Appendix E

Principals and Inclusion Survey

The purpose of this survey is to determine the opinions of elementary principals toward the inclusion movement and to gather information about the types of training and experience that principals have. There are no right or wrong answers so please address the questions to the best of your knowledge and provide us with what you believe.

****

SECTION I- Demographic Information

The following information will be only be used to describe the population being studied.

1. Approximate number of all students in your building:

   0-250 251-500 501-750 751-1000 1000 or more

2. Average class size for all students:

   0-9 10-19 20-29 30-39 40 or more

3. Approximate percentage of students with IEPs in your building: (*Do not include gifted*)

   0-5% 6-10% 11-15% 16-20% 21% or more

4. Approximate number of students with IEPs in your building that are included in regular education classrooms for at least 75% of their school day: (*Do not include gifted*)

   0-20% 21-40% 41-60% 61-80% 81-100%

Appendix E, continued

SECTION II- Training and Experience

1. Your age:

20-30 31-40 41-50 51-60
61 or more

2. Gender: Male Female

3. Years of full-time regular education teaching experience:

0 1-6 7-12 13-18 19 or more

4. Years of full-time special education teaching experience:

0 1-6 7-12 13-18 19 or more

5. Years as an elementary school principal:

0-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21 or more

Note: From "Attitudes of elementary school principals toward the inclusion of students with disabilities," by C. Praisner, (2003), Dissertation. Used with permission.

Appendix E, continued

6. Approximate number of special education credits in your formal training:

0 1-9 10-15 16-21 22 or more

7. Approximate number of inservice training hours in inclusive practices:

0 1-8 9-16 17-24 25 or more

8. Mark the areas below that were included in your formal training such as courses, workshops, and/or significant portions of courses (10% of content or more).

Characteristics of students with disabilities

Behavior management class for working with students with disabilities

Academic programming for students with disabilities

Special education law

Crisis intervention

Life skills training for students with disabilities

Teambuilding

Interagency cooperation

Family intervention training

Supporting and training teachers to handle inclusion

Change process

Eliciting parent and community support for inclusion

Fostering teacher collaboration

Field based experiences with actual inclusion activities

9. Are you certified in special education? No Yes

Appendix E, continued

10. Does your school have a specific plan to deal with crisis involving students with special needs? No Yes

11. Do you have personal experience with (an) individual(s) with a disability outside the school setting, i.e. family member, friend, etc.? No Yes
If yes, please indicate relationship to you.

Self Immediate family member Extended family member
Friend Neighbor Other: _____

12. Does your school district's mission statement include a vision for the inclusion of students with disabilities? No Yes

13. In general, what has your experience been with the following types of students in the school setting. Mark one level of experience for each disability category.

Appendix E, continued

Disability Type	Negative Experience	Somewhat Negative Experience	No Experience	Somewhat Positive Experience	Positive Experience
Specific learning disability					
Mental retardation					
Serious emotional disturbance					
Blindness/visual impairment					
Deafness/hearing impairment					
Speech and language impairment					
Other health impairment					
Physical disability					
Multi-disabled					
Autism/pervasive developmental disorder					
Neurological impairment					

Appendix E, continued

SECTION III- Attitudes Toward Inclusion of Students with Special Needs

Please mark your response to each item using the following scale:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Only teachers with extensive special education experience can be expected to deal with students with severe/profound disabilities in a school setting.					
2. Schools with both students with severe and profound disabilities and students without disabilities enhance the learning experiences of students with severe/profound disabilities.					
3. Students with severe/profound disabilities are too impaired to benefit from the activities of a regular school.					
4. A good regular educator can do a lot to help a student with a severe/profound disability.					
5. In general, students with severe/profound disabilities should be placed in special classes/schools specifically designed for them.					
6. Students without disabilities can profit from contact with students with severe/profound disabilities.					
7. Regular education should be modified to meet the needs of all students including students with severe/profound disabilities.					
8. It is unfair to ask/expect regular teachers to accept students with severe/profound disabilities.					
9. No discretionary financial resources should be allocated for the integration of students with severe/profound disabilities.					
10. It should be policy and/or law that students with severe/profound disabilities are integrated into regular educational programs and activities.					

Appendix E, continued

SECTION IV- Most Appropriate Placements for Students with Disabilities

Although individual characteristics would need to be considered, please mark the placement that, in general, you believe is most appropriate for students with the following disabilities:

Specific Learning Disability
- Special education services outside regular school
- Special class for most or all of the school day
- Part-time special education class
- Regular classroom instruction and resource room
- Regular classroom instruction for most of day
- Full-time regular education with support

Mental Retardation
- Special education services outside regular school
- Special class for most or all of the school day
- Part-time special education class
- Regular classroom instruction and resource room
- Regular classroom instruction for most of day
- Full-time regular education with support

Serious Emotional Disturbance
- Special education services outside regular school
- Special class for most or all of the school day
- Part-time special education class
- Regular classroom instruction and resource room
- Regular classroom instruction for most of day
- Full-time regular education with support

Blindness/visual impairment
- Special education services outside regular school
- Special class for most or all of the school day
- Part-time special education class
- Regular classroom instruction and resource room
- Regular classroom instruction for most of day
- Full-time regular education with support

Deafness/hearing impairment
- Special education services outside regular school
- Special class for most or all of the school day
- Part-time special education class
- Regular classroom instruction and resource room
- Regular classroom instruction for most of day
- Full-time regular education with support

Speech and language impairment
- Special education services outside regular school
- Special class for most or all of the school day
- Part-time special education class
- Regular classroom instruction and resource room
- Regular classroom instruction for most of day
- Full-time regular education with support

Other health impairment
- Special education services outside regular school
- Special class for most or all of the school day
- Part-time special education class
- Regular classroom instruction and resource room
- Regular classroom instruction for most of day
- Full-time regular education with support

Physical Disability
- Special education services outside regular school
- Special class for most or all of the school day
- Part-time special education class
- Regular classroom instruction and resource room
- Regular classroom instruction for most of day
- Full-time regular education with support

Multi-disabled
- Special education services outside regular school
- Special class for most or all of the school day
- Part-time special education class
- Regular classroom instruction and resource room
- Regular classroom instruction for most of day
- Full-time regular education with support

Autism/pervasive developmental disorder
- Special education services outside regular school
- Special class for most or all of the school day
- Part-time special education class
- Regular classroom instruction and resource room
- Regular classroom instruction for most of day
- Full-time regular education with support

Neurological impairment
- Special education services outside regular school
- Special class for most or all of the school day
- Part-time special education class
- Regular classroom instruction and resource room
- Regular classroom instruction for most of day
- Full-time regular education with support

Thank you for taking the time to answer all of the questions on this survey. We appreciate your assistance with this study!

Appendix F

Permission to Use the Principal and Inclusion Survey (PIS)

Read Message

From:

Cindy and Tom Praisner <praisner@netzero.net>

[Add to Address Book]

To:

wrushman@comcast.net

Subject:

Re: Permission to Use your PIS

Date:

Monday, February 26, 2007 10:07:38 AM

[View Source]

Top of Form

Bottom of Form

Barbara-

You have my permission to use the PIS in your research. However, please remember that Section III was adapted from the work of George Stainback who adapted it from an autism scale. You may want to speak with your advisor about whether or not you need to have his permission as well. Section IV was developed by me and so there is no additional concern there. If you need formal permission, please draft a letter requesting it that I can sign.

Best Wishes,

Cindy

wrushman@comcast.net wrote:

>Dear Dr. Praisner,

>

>We communicated several months ago and you were kind enough to send me a copy of your Principal and Inclusion Survey along with the instrument description. I would like to use the survey in my dissertation research. I am particularly interested in Sections Three and Four. I would like to formally ask for your permission to use your survey and instrument description in my research and final paper with proper citations given to you for your work.

>

>Thank you.

>Barbara R. Wrushen

VITA

Barbara Rivers Wrushen was born and grew up in Rome, Georgia where she graduated from Main High School. She received her B.A. degree from Shorter College with a major in psychology and a double minor in education and sociology. She completed the MEd program at Georgia State University in Atlanta concentrating on Special Education. From there, she went to The University of Tennessee in Knoxville and earned an EdS degree in educational administration. In 2009, Barbara received the PhD in Education with a concentration in educational administration and supervision from the University of Tennessee-Knoxville. Barbara is employed in the Pupil Personnel Department of the Knox County School System in Knoxville, Tennessee where she has worked for 29 years.